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JEAN MONTEITH

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BY

M. G. McCLELLAND

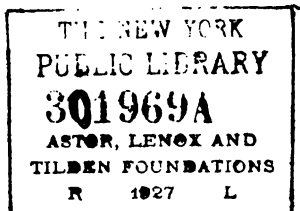
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MY DEAR MENTOR :

In putting this note into "Jean" without going through the form of saying with your leave, or by your leave, I have a precarious, insecure kind of feeling akin to that which might accrue from handling an explosive. To speak inelegantly, I think that you will probably "blow me up" for doing it ; but I am willing to take the risk for the pleasure of making some feeble acknowledgment of the wise counsels and generous sympathy with which you have aided my intellectual growth. To this end I gratefully dedicate to you my fourth story.

M. G. McC.

ELM COTTAGE, Aug. 21, 1887.

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OF NEW YORK.
JEAN MONTEITH.

CHAPTER I.

MALARIAL fever with a typhoid tendency was rife in the land. Every house was a hospital, every family could swell the sick list with one or more victims. Among the hills, in the out-lying district, the mischief was deadly enough ; but in the straggling out-at-elbows village the force of the disease was trebled.

The village—called Melrose, by a homesick Scotchman who had been its founder—was situated among the foot-hills of the Cumberland Range where it crosses the northern part of Alabama. It had started well up on the hillside ; but had gradually slipped down on to the low land through which flowed the sluggish stream that supplied motive power to the cotton-seed-oil mill which was the principal industry of the place. Houses of the better sort still looked down from the vantage ground of the hill ; but the village proper lay at its foot, and the main street, scarcely *more than* a country road, was not a hundred

yards from the bank of the river. It extended from the west end of the village where were the few stores, the church, and the "Black Bear" tavern, to the east end where were huddled together the shanties of the colored mill-hands.

Here malaria made its stronghold, intrenching itself, with ague for advanced guard and typhoid for a grim reserve. Here the people took to their beds in earnest, or, at best, crawled feebly about their business, too racked and tormented to have strength, or faith, to pray for the frost which would be their bodily salvation.

The cause of all this trouble was a very great improvement set on foot by an enterprising farmer from Vermont, who had come down to the South, as to a land of promise, with a little money and the hope of making more. He bought a goodly tract of land for a price that made him wonder, and sent North for his family with intent to stay, and grow a vine and fig-tree.

The farm was a mile above the village and more adjacent to the mountains, and on it was a great, green pond, the delight of frogs and newts and village lads and lassies, and the cause of half the sickness that visited that region. It was a pretty, pestilential spot, much over-grown, and with no means of flowing outward, for time and neglect had caused the ditch, which had been its outlet, to become choked with weeds and rubbish. *It did its nefarious work so slowly; bred its mi-*

asma so insensibly, and looked so pretty withal, under its marsh weeds and lilies, and the waving of its long-limbed willows, that people forgot to lay the blame where the blame was due, and took no steps for the mitigation of the evil, content to admire the beauty of the spot and to accept their chills as celestial dispensation.

With the new blood came a different standard, and a different way of viewing nature : enterprise took a hard grip on the farm, intelligence cultivated to the point of obstinacy and there left, cast a seeing eye over the situation, and energy promptly turned the cess-pool into the little river. This was a notable bit of engineering, and an improvement on native customs. It deserved applause, for, by it, two full acres of arable land had been recovered, and a good farm rid of a nuisance that, for years, had depreciated it half its value. The only drawback was, that the whole thing, from inception to carrying out, had been premature. Knowledge is wonderful, and enterprise is better ; but, to be thoroughly effective, both should be a trifle modest.

"Ef you-un aim ter drain thet thar pond o' you-uns, mister," drawled old Jack Johns, when the subject was mooted on the tavern porch, "I reckon yer mout ez well wait t' well arter frost. Ther bottom o' ther pond hev been er stranger ter daylight fur better'n fifty ye'r, an' ther sun hev got er sight o' power. Thar's truck that

banks up under water : truck thet rots an' makes er stink, ef onduly fetched ter view o' sunshine. Wait t' well arter frost, naybor, wait t' well arter frost."

But this the man of enterprise refused to do, having a large contempt for the counsel of the thriftless. Besides, he had arranged to have the work done at once, and had no mind for waste of time or money. To do him justice, he had, despite his knowledge, no realization of the fervor of the southern sun at noonday, or the languor of the southern air at nightfall, which will absorb all floating poison and then forbear to carry it from the country. And dearly did he pay for his sin of scorn and heedlessness, for the demons of disease, set at liberty by his ditch, swooped down on him and his among the first, and cast all prone upon their beds, smitten of chills and sorely buffeted by fever.

With the effect of unpopular enterprise burned and shaken into him, the stranger, therefore, entered on a season of repentance, and swore by the graves of his fathers, that, if the Lord should spare him from his own, he would attempt naught in this forsaken country, save the getting out of it, without due consultation.

The doctors had a weary time of it, because there were so few. In lonely districts, apart from competition, the stir of money-getting and the *hope of fame*, the professions are scantily repre-

sented. Enough to carry on the ordinary work of life when there is no haste or pressure ; but never enough for the management of a crisis, without an overstrain which is sometimes fatal in its results.

In all that region, to cope with the giant disease, there were only two physicians, Dr. Fergus Monteith, who had been the public break-water against the tide of death for many years, and a young man named Ravenel, who had come to Melrose six months before through the influence of Mrs. Tinsley, the wife of the minister, who was his kinswoman.

Dr. Ravenel was a slight, well-knit young man of five or six and twenty ; dark-eyed, energetic and intellectual. In manner he was nervous and vivacious, showing a strain of Gallic blood ; in temperament he was cool, practical and progressive. To get all possible good out of the old ways, but never to let them block and chain him, was his practice, and, like most young and active minded men, he was as full of theories as a gander is of persistence.

Among other inventions with which his genius toyed, was a cure for malarial fever, which for potency and power went miles ahead of the established practice. The remedy was in the form of a hideous solution against which the senses entered protest as well as the quailing stomach. In odor, it suggested the orthodox conception of

the reek of the bottomless abyss, and in taste, the very pestilence and death it had been concocted to avert.

In the efficacy of the compound Dr. Ravenel believed with the faith of an inventor, and he prescribed it whenever he got the chance. But he was new to the place and his theories were new, and a departure from time-honored precedent : so the people, case-hardened in conservatism, would not believe in him, nor send for him, if they could help themselves, nor swallow one drop of his medicament. A suspicion of its smell had gone abroad and turned them all against it. It was odors and innovation that had made them ill, they said, and they had no mind to try them further. Old Jack Johns had been heard to remark tentatively that "ther ha'r o' er dog war good for ther bite ;" but every body knew that old Jack was a radical, and a follower of new lights.

"What the devil makes them so pig-headed," fretted Dr. Ravenel impatiently. "The fever is making headway among the whites every day. I go to see them, whether they send for me or not, and prescribe and all that ; but what good does it do ? They say 'yes, sir : mebbly so, sir, inco'se you-uns knows yer biz'nes ;' but they don't mind a word I say, nor take a drop of my medicine. As likely as not, they throw it out of doors, and boil up a lot of bark and stuff that some old *woman's grandmother* 'lowed war good fur agurs,'

way back in the time of Noah. It's enough to make a saint swear to be hampered by ignorance and obstinacy in the way I am!"

The doctor threw himself into a chair and kicked aside a hassock irritably. He had just come in from a thankless round among people who did not want him and was feeling sore and baffled. It is hard on a man to feel power of any sort in him and be balked of its natural outlet, and Dr. Ravenel felt that the probabilities were in favor of his benefiting the sick if they would only let him.

The Rev. Mr. Tinsley, an easy-going man, much in the habit of dropping into Ravenel's office to talk or read the papers, felt that the young man was being unfairly treated, so he laid aside his paper and administered consolation.

"They'll come around after awhile," he said in his soft drawl. "Give them time. The absorption of a new idea is a slow and painful process—they shrink from it. *You* are a new idea, and they shrink from you. Rest easy! They'll bolt you whole before long."

"Much good it will do them," growled the doctor, "the press is *now*—this moment. Death is bolting *them*, as a black-snake bolts frogs. The medicine *does* do good! Look at the negroes! They take it, and all my colored patients are improving."

"Oh, *negroes* will take any thing!" affirmed

Mr. Tinsley, speaking hastily, but without discourteous intention. "They'd turn a drug shop into their insides any day for the pleasure of the thing. Negroes dote on physic, and the worse it tastes, the better they like it."

"They've got more sense than the whites," retorted Ravenel; "there is Jim Peter's family, down by the mill, they were all down with the fever—seven of them. They are convalescing now, and Jim went back to work this morning. A white family, in the same lot, were taken at the same time. They wouldn't send for me and couldn't get Monteith, who is driven day and night, so they doctored themselves and two of them have died and the rest are very low, they tell me."

The minister looked grave.

"I know," he repeated, "they are terribly narrow and opinionated—so many of them have Scotch blood. I've been urging them to send for you, but they say that your practice isn't like Monteith's."

"They don't know what it's like. They've never tried it. Not more than half-a-dozen have given me a chance. My practice is that of the new school. Monteith approves of it. We've met in consultation. He's no bigot."

"They're used to Monteith."

"They're killing him. He is in the saddle from *daylight till dark*, and often far into the night ;

riding from Dan to Beersheba, and here am I—a hale, able-bodied fellow, who ought to be doing most of the work, sitting still in my office swearing. It is Monteith I'm thinking of, as much as the sick. He's being worked to death and there doesn't seem to be any way to stop it. I don't care a damn for the confidence of the people after the stress is over. I want it *now*."

Mr. Tinsley took up his hat and stick. It was getting toward his dinner hour, and his wife disliked lack of punctuality.

As he held out his hand, he said: "Do what you can, Ravenel, and I'll try to help you. There is a look about Monteith's face that I don't like much. I noticed it yesterday. He is being overworked, I fear."

"He is being killed, I *know*," repeated the other man. "If the fever should hold much longer, and he doesn't take some rest, he'll be a dead man within three months. Monteith isn't young, and flesh and blood can't stand the strain he's putting on himself. He ought to refuse to go to some of the people, and force them to send for me."

The minister spoke quickly.

"He couldn't do that, you know. He's known these people all his life. They depend on him." Then, after a pause, he added, "It will be hard on Jean."

CHAPTER II.

A MAN rarely dies of over-work all at once. He wastes: the machinery, worn by too constant friction, labors on, but labors heavily. If there should be organic disease, during the season of prostration it will make headway, sapping and mining and carrying one defense after another.

It was so with Dr. Monteith. All through the sickly season, he worked at high pressure, sparing himself nothing, and when the lowered temperature and sharp frosts of autumn brought him tardy aid, it came too late to be of much benefit to the over-strained man. He kept going, it is true; but more and more slowly as the sturdy mind met with ever feebler response from the waning physical powers.

"I'm wearing out, little one," he would say half sadly to his daughter Jean. "The engine doesn't answer the demands of the engineer any longer. The springs are worn and the wheels are getting clogged. We'll have to push it on to the siding soon, dear, and leave the track clear for a new one."

"The passengers would fold their hands and

say their prayers in earnest then, father," Jean would reply, in loving pride in him. "They would think total wreck the smallest ill impending. You forget that new things are at a discount here."

She would run out to the gate to meet him and smile and jest while he let himself slowly down from his horse with his hand in the mane, instead of dismounting with the old strong swing of the muscular frame. And, still smiling, she would take the bridle from his hand and fasten the good horse to the hitching-post, and draw his arm around her own young shoulders and lead him up to the house.

She was not frightened about him, even when the circles under his eyes deepened, and his step faltered, and his arm on her shoulder trembled. He was tired, worn down with over-exertion ; this dreadful fever, the exactions of the people, who had been merciless to their old friend, the constant anxiety and the lack of proper food—which for weeks had only been obtainable in hurried snatches, at long intervals ; all this had told upon him ; but it was over now. There were no new cases, the old ones were progressing favorably, and soon he would be able to rest—to rest and grow strong again.

The idea that her father might be dying, never entered her mind. Disease and death not infrequently formed the topic of their

conversation, for the doctor was an enthusiast in his profession, and his daughter interested herself in things that interested him. But such questions had been abstract; in no way did they touch *her*. She was prone to abstract views as yet; her life had been sheltered and uneventful. Her father formed her active element; was the vent for all emotion. Into his nature she precipitated her own as fully as she could; his hopes, aims, and ambitions were the solvent that held hers in solution.

The recognition of the grief in store for her, came to Jean one evening as she sat alone with him in his study, before the blazing hickory logs. The evening meal was over: Jean's household matters had been attended to, and she was ready for their usual occupation.

This was the revision by Dr. Monteith, and the copying by Jean of the manuscript of the great work which would make the name of Monteith one of honor in the scientific world. It was an exhaustive treatise on Nervous Diseases—their causes and treatment, in which the author had taken up what he conceived to be an entirely new line of thought. The subject was handled psychologically, as well as physically, and the theories developed were the crystallization of years of research and experience. Into the work the doctor had thrown all the force of a trained intellect and a sympathetic nature, and as the plan of it

had expanded into nobler form and become imbued with deeper humanity, it had absorbed more and more of the good man's life, and had become as dear to him as the pulse of his heart; as dear as was the child with whom, in his mind, it had been twin-born.

But life, that had held much bitterness for the doctor, had dregs that were like aloes to him. His work was not finished, and it would never be finished by him, for he was dying, and he knew it. The reservoir into which he had faithfully guided each stream of thought, each rill of experience, must remain locked to the world, or have its flood-gate raised by another hand than his. He fought his battle manfully, striving for patience, for acquiescence in a decree which he knew to be unalterable; but there would come times when it would seem to him a terrible pity, a waste that was hard to comprehend. He was dying, and in no way did his life, to him, appear to have reached fruition.

"Don't bring out the book to-night, my child," he said when Jean rose from her place at his knee to make the usual preparations, "I don't feel up to it. We will rest to-night. There is something I want to say to you."

Jean came to his side at once. "Does your head ache, father?" she asked, laying her cool hand on his forehead.

"Not *especially*. I ache all over, child. Some-

times it seems best that I should give up altogether, Jean, and sit quietly in the chimney-corner until the end comes. I'm worn out, body and mind—body and mind, both."

His look was so depressed, his tone so unutterably mournful that Jean was startled. It was unlike her brave, cheerful father, to give way like this—he who rarely admitted fatigue, who never yielded to despondency. A cold fear slipped into her bosom and coiled around her heart. She looked at him anxiously, seeking reassurance; but, as she looked, her heart grew faint, and the fear tightened its hold. He was ill—very ill; the hollowed cheek, the languid movements, the shortened breath, the heavy circles under the eyes, told a tale to her quickened vision that made her blindness of weeks—or had it been months?—seem past understanding. Where had her eyes—where had her love been, that she had not observed the change, had not foreseen it with love's prescience? An agony of terror arose and swelled within her; the tension on her throat amounted to physical pain.

The doctor lay back in his chair and watched the flames leap up and curl around the logs. It was cold outside; on the ground and the trees and fence-rails lay a rime of frost. The fire burned warmly and filled the old-fashioned room with light and comfort. On the top lay a damp, *unseasoned stick of white-oak*; it would not burn,

and dense, black smoke infolded it. The flames caressed and coaxed it, trying to dispel the smoke and warm it into responsiveness; but the log sulked on, and presently the flames left it and renewed their hold on the lower logs, which, beneath their ardor, slowly melted. Then the tough heart of the white-oak began to glow—reluctantly at first, and then with steadfast heat.

Jean nestled close to her father's side and took his hand in both of hers; the brave, skillful hand that was so gentle, so helpful. She would not give way, or make a scene, or exhaust his strength. She had sufficient knowledge of his art to realize that there are times when self must be set aside, when feeling must be held under, and had she been as ignorant as the veriest boor, her love would have taught her. She would be strong and bright and brave, and never let him see her anxiety, or guess at the fear in her heart. It would be time enough to think of herself when he should be well again. She put the other possibility resolutely aside and said over to herself, "when he shall be well again."

Soon the doctor began to speak of business. There would not be much, he said, but enough to keep up the place, and to live on in the quiet way in which they had always lived. He had been a careless man, neglectful of material interests, in the press of other matters. His will, and a *paper of directions* were in his desk; the care

of the property had been placed in Mr. Winthrope's hands, he had been made trustee. He was a lawyer and would do all things needful to spare her trouble or annoyance. There were some outstanding accounts which might be presented, but must not be pressed, because the people were poor and the year had been a hard one. He wished her to keep the home together as long as there should be need, and afterward she might sell it if it should seem best to her. Clive Winthrope would attend to it all and be a staunch friend to her. He was a good man.

The doctor looked at his daughter wistfully, and passed his hand softly over her hair. Her head was pressed against his knee and her eyes were on the fire. She did not seem to be attending, although when the doctor said more words in praise of Winthrope she assented absently. The father sighed: it would be lonely for her when he should be gone.

After a moment he spoke again.

"Be tender with your sister, Jean—tender and patient as I have always been. It will be hard, my darling; a constant giving, hoping for nothing again. It will be a cruel task; but, child, keep her with you always: never send her away among strangers. I could not bear it. It may not be for long; I hardly think it can be. But whether the *time be long* or short, promise me to keep her to *the end*. *It isn't her fault*. She's bearing the

sin of others. Be gentle with her, Jean—gentle and pitiful.”

“Oh, father!” almost wailed the girl, “I am—I have been! all these years since I’ve been old enough to understand. Ever since that night when the knowledge of how it was, was burned into me, I have tried—tried loyally!”

“I know, my darling, that it has been hard. I would have spared you had it been possible—would spare you now were the power with me. The bitterness of death, my little one, is that I must leave this burden on your shoulders.”

The wind moaned and whistled as it swept around the corner of the house, the shutters rattled as though a hand shook them; the limbs of the trees creaked; away in the distance a dog howled—a long-drawn note that the echoes caught up and repeated.

“Don’t judge your mother, Jean. It was not altogether her fault. I blame myself bitterly, ceaselessly. If I had acted differently, been more watchful, more prudent, things might have been different. But my time was so engrossed—I did not realize the danger. She was much alone, and suffered only as a nervous woman can suffer.”

His voice was low and quivered with a reflex of the pain that made his soul sick within him. *Jean laid her lips against the hand she held. Her*

heart was heavy with unshed tears, and the pulses in her throat fluttered.

"Take care of my book, Jean," he said presently. "I leave it to you a sacred charge. If I could have finished it—if I could have given the world one perfected work, my life would not seem such a failure. It is hard and bitter; but I am schooling myself to patience. Keep the book by you, my child, and later on give it into hands competent to carry through what I have commenced. All the materials for the second part, the notes, memoranda, etc., are ready, and only need to be digested and brought into proper form. There is much that I meant should go into that part—thought and experience that would be of inestimable value to the work; but that is out of the question now. There is sufficient material to give a scholar insight into my method, and my grasp of the subject—to enable him to comprehend and carry out my thought. It would have been a joy and pride to have my name stand alone upon the title-page; but I must put up with divided honors. Only—child, *be* careful! Test your man thoroughly; *know* him to be a real scholar. Don't give the work into unworthy hands."

Jean raised her head and turned her face toward him.

"I will not fail you, father," she said steadily; "*your work will be safe* with me. It shall have

justice. I will be faithful in all things—faithful and true as you have been.”

The doctor drew her to his breast.

“My little one,” he murmured tenderly, “how can I lay the burden of my life upon you? How *can* I do it? You are so young, my brave darling, that to let you pledge yourself seems selfish—almost cruel.”

Jean rose to her feet and extended her hand as a man does when he seeks to ratify an agreement.

“I will swear it, father,” she said solemnly. “There is no one in all the world but me. I am yours, and your work is mine. I will take it up where you lay it down and be loyal to it as far as in me lies.”

Then she dropped her head on his shoulder with a pitiful wail, “Oh, father, father!—get well!—*try* to get well for my sake!”

CHAPTER III.

BUT getting well, or even trying to get well, was beyond the good man's power. He lingered a few weeks, growing steadily more feeble, and at last, on the morning of the New Year, ere day had fully dawned, he entered into rest.

The neighbors were very kind, helpful and considerate, for the doctor had been the friend of high and low, and his death was a common sorrow. They came and went about the house and strove to comfort Jean, telling her how much better off her father was, and that resignation was her duty. She listened, gazing at them with strained, tearless eyes and a look that almost made them conscious of the inadequacy of their well-meant words. She thanked them; but they did not touch her, and they brought no tears.

"I don't understand her," said Mrs. Tinsley, almost in tears herself. "To-day, at the grave, when I thought she *must* break down, she was as quiet as possible—far the most composed person in the church-yard. When the earth struck *against the coffin* I got close to her, feeling sure *that she would cry out*; but she only shivered. I

don't believe she has shed a tear. What can she be?—a stone."

"No: a woman, and that's a much more incomprehensible thing," replied Dr. Ravenel, who had walked home from the church with Maud Tinsley. "Don't you see that she's stunned? Nature has been thrown out of gear and has to pull herself together before she can perform her usual functions. Miss Monteith hardly realizes yet where she is hurt, or how. Give her time, and let her alone, all of you, to work this thing out for herself. It will be better so."

"But it will look so unfeeling," murmured Maud, raising her beautiful eyes, filled with ready tears, to her cousin's. "It makes me feel like crying every time I think of her standing there so still and white—and—and—unnatural. Don't you think so?" appealing to him, "don't you think it unnatural for a woman not to weep in trouble?"

Dr. Ravenel watched the tears quiver on the long, dark lashes, and then fall on the soft cheek. His heart stirred and he felt that this was the poetry of grief. There is another sort, though—the prose of real woe, tense and strong; the sort that goes into few words. He knew it well.

"For most women—yes," he answered, "but not for her. To her sort, tears come as slowly as they do to men. A woman like that *wrestles* with grief. Let her alone. That's my advice to you all. *Don't fuss around her, or torment her with*

attentions ; and, above all, don't insult her sorrow with 'consolatory' platitudes."

Mrs. Tinsley drew herself up. "I'm sure, Theodore," she remarked with asperity, "that I have never tormented Jean in any possible way. I *never* intrude sympathy or attentions on any one. Dr. Monteith was a good man and we were all warmly attached to him ; we have tried to be kind to Jean on his account as well as her own. As for 'fussing' and 'tormenting,' as you are pleased to call it, I don't think any of *that* has been done. I'm distressed for the child, and I have talked to her as a mother and a Christian ; it was my duty. And I don't understand how the consolations of religion can 'insult' any one !"

"There, there, Margaret, never mind about getting on your high horse," interposed her easy-going husband. "We all know what Ravenel means ; that Jean is in too stunned a condition to comprehend what is said to her, much less be comforted by it. Ravenel spoke from the standpoint of his profession, and from the standpoint of mine, I can't say but what I agree with him. Leave Jean's spiritual case in the hands of the Great Physician. He can manage it. Our part, just now, is to look after her body. Is any one with her ?"

"No one except her mammy. Ever so many *of us* offered to stay with her, but she declined—

said that she would rather be alone. What could one do?"

"What about—is there nothing—?" hesitated the minister.

"Nothing at all, that I know of. I tried to find out something from mammy; but she was very guarded, and I did not like to question the other servants."

Dr. Ravenel glanced from one to the other; but the subject was not pursued, and he shortly afterward took his leave. There were still a few cases of fever about, the aftermath of the disease, and Dr. Monteith's illness and death had thrown the work on to the younger man's shoulders.

Meanwhile, Jean sat, huddled together, in her father's arm-chair, in the benumbed torpor which is an inevitable phase of grief in strong natures. Her mammy came in from time to time to attend to her bodily needs. But mammy was a quiet woman, and understood her nursling too well to offer any sympathy, save such as could be conveyed by terms of childish endearment, and tender strokings of the bent head with her dark hand.

It had turned cold, and the ground was frozen hard—there had been snow the day before, an unusual thing in Alabama. The wind had drifted it in heaps, leaving most of the ground bare. The January day had closed in darkly, and the house, half a mile from the village, was very quiet.

The shutters had been closed, but the curtains were looped back. Jean, sitting over the fire, could hear the sound of a horse's hoofs away on the road toward the mountains. The atmosphere was heavy, so that sound could travel a long distance. The horse was coming on at a hard gallop, and Jean listened, as she had listened to similar sounds many times before. In the beat of the iron heels she could read the story of illness, terror, and urgent need of aid. This messenger must pass; there was no help here for sick or suffering. Her breast heaved and her hands wrung themselves together.

What was that? There must be some mistake. The long gallop ended at the gate; the latch clashed as the gate swung open; footsteps came rapidly up the walk and on to the low front porch; a knock, sharp, and imperative, fell on the closed door and echoed through the empty house.

Jean turned her head and waited for an answer to the summons. None came. Mammy was in the upper part of the house and the doors were closed; the other servants were at their cabins in the yard. The knock sounded again, louder and more insistent. Mechanically Jean rose to answer it herself, but paused as the footsteps advanced along the porch. A hand was laid on the shutters, and they were shaken roughly.

"Is any body thar?" a voice called. "Ef thar is, *fur God's sake* answer. I can't make any body

hear, an' I want ther doctor. Whar is he? It's life an' death."

The awfulness of the summons struck her like a blow. There had been patients everywhere, even back in the recesses of the mountains. The weather had been bad, and few people had passed; news traveled slowly in the winter. This messenger did not know that his ride had only brought him to a grave.

Jean advanced to the window, raised the sash and pushed against the shutters. They were hard to open, and the man outside jerked them with his strong hand. He was a rough backwoodsman, clad in homespun; his trowsers were thrust into his boots and the brim of his limp wool hat was turned up against the crown. His sunburned face, with its unkempt beard, was made almost pathetic by its anxiety, and his light-blue eyes eagerly explored the room.

Jean knew him. His name was Danvers, and he had worked for her father once when she had been a child. His distress was palpable; evidently he had ridden far and fast.

"What is it? Who is ill?" Jean questioned.

"My baby, marm—little Ferg; him, ther ole 'ooman named arter ther doctor. He's mighty low. We-uns air afeard he's dyin'! Whar's ther doctor? Ef he ain't at home, I must ride arter him. It's life an' death. Whar is he?"

Jean's breath tangled in her throat, "We buried

him at noon to-day,"—the words came in a sort of dry sob.

The mountaineer staggered and caught at the side of the window with his brown hand.

"Good — God — A'mighty!" he said slowly. Then, his own urgent need getting the upper hand, he cried out to her, "What kin I do? God in Heaven!—what kin I do? He were all ther hope we-un hed. The boy will die!"

"Ride on for Dr. Ravenel. In the village, you know. He's very skillful. He'll do all that can be done. Ride quickly—go at once!" She spoke in short hard gasps; she was in the grip of her own pain; but she was sorry for him.

The man shook his head.

"He ain't thar. He've been called away. I passed him ez I come down ther mounting gwine some-whars at er gallop. I dunno whar—nor which-er-way; ther road forks arter ther place I passed him. God above!—ef I just *hed* knowed. I'd er stopped him ef I'd hed to knock him off'n his horse. Good Lord!—Good Lord!—to think—an' ther chile so low!" then roused from his absorption by the look on her face, he added quickly: "God forgive me fur a brute! You-un hev got ther butt-end o' ther load to tote. I'm sorry fur you. Er fren' fur time o' need we-un hev lost; but ther row will be weedier then thet fur you. I'm sorry fur you—sorry plumb down to ther *groun'!*"

Jean put out her hand to him and returned the pressure he gave it. A resolution was forming in her mind, and, in her tense mood, it seemed to her that she could feel her father's presence in the room, and that it urged her to action.

"What's the matter with the child?" she asked.

But the father did not know. The boy had been ailing ever since he had had the fever, early in the autumn. He did not thrive. That morning the children had been wild about the snow, they were not used to snow. They had collected enough to make snow-balls to pelt each other. One of the larger children had crammed a handful down the little fellow's back, and he had come in to his mother crying. She had taken off his wet frock and got him an ear of pop-corn, and popped it for him. He had eaten it and been comforted; but after awhile he had begun to cry again, and finally to scream so that they could do nothing with him. Then he had had "a sort of fit," his mother said, and had sunk into a stupor. They had grown frightened, and the father had come straight off for help. He *dared* not go back without it; but must, for if the child should die he must be beside the mother.

While he talked, Jean had taken her father's saddle-bags and whip from a cabinet and placed them on the table. The man watched her, not divining her *purpose*, but finding relief in giving

his trouble words. In a moment she turned to him and held out a key.

"Take this," she directed, "and go round to the back porch. In the outside closet you'll find two saddles; take them, go to the stable and saddle both horses. If Uncle Ben should be about, tell him that you have my orders and make him help you. Leave your own horse here; he's blown and tired. Be as quick as you can. We have no time to lose."

Danvers stared at her, turning the key in his hand; he failed to catch her meaning.

"Ther doctor's dead," he said slowly, "what air yer gwine to do?"

"His work," she answered. "Go and do as I tell you. If you stand there staring the child will die. I'm going with you—will help you. You can trust me. Now *go*; we have lost too much time already."

Like a subaltern at the command of his officer, he went instantly, and Jean busied herself with the needful preparations. They must ride as she had never ridden in her life, if such skill as she possessed was to be effective. When the heavy cloth skirt had been slipped on and the little fur cap tied firmly down with a long veil, Jean crossed the passage to a door opposite her own. It opened into a sort of ante-room, and beyond was another door concealed by a heavy felt portière. This *Jean opened also and glanced in.* The inner room

was dimly lighted by a shaded lamp and the glow of a wood fire. All was still, and the sound of regular breathing told of slumber. Closing the door noiselessly, Jean retraced her steps; at her own door she paused and locked it, removing the key lest mammy should discover her absence and be frightened. Then she ran quickly down again to the study, caught up the saddle-bags and whip and let herself out through the window, which she carefully closed behind her.

Danvers had the horses at the gate by the time she reached it, and swung her up to her saddle without a word; then he threw himself on to the big gray that had been the doctor's. Mile followed mile, the horses galloping side by side, the riders intent only on speed. The road wound among the hills, ascending and descending, rough and rocky. Sometimes it broadened to a wagon-track, sometimes narrowed to a bridle-path. In the ravines and gullies, snow lay in white patches; but the road was bare and frozen hard, like stone; the iron shoes fell on it with the dull regular beat of the hand hammer on metal. In some places small streams crossed the road, turned now to sheets of ice, over which they jumped the horses, for fear of a stumble or fall. It was cold, with a keen wind from the east. Jean shivered, and her companion reined back his horse and rode up on the side next the wind, to shelter her with his body.

"How much further is it?" she questioned.

"A mile," he answered. "My house is beyant thet thar pine woods. Turn in here, Miss Jean, it's ther nighest way," and laying his hand on her rein he guided both horses into an opening among the trees.

The track narrowed, and they were obliged to follow it in single file. The trees sheltered them from the wind, which moaned overhead as the wind only moans among pine boughs; the moon had risen, but it was dark among the tree stems. Jean could hardly discern the tall figure in front, but her horse followed his leader steadily. A thrill of happiness, almost of exultation, passed through her; grief fell away, and the awful sense of bereavement withdrew into the background. Her father seemed to her no longer dead, only, as it were, in another room, resting in the certainty that it would be well with his work, that it was in his child's hands, and that she would be faithful.

It grew lighter; the trees stood further apart, and the horses could move abreast again; a carpet of pine needles covered the frozen ground and muffled their tread. The light of the low moon silvered the shafts of the pines and made more dark the canopy of boughs; the wind had sunk to a whisper, and like specters they seemed to flit through a spectral forest.

Soon they came to a clearing with a log-cabin *in the center, from the window of which streamed*

a light. Danvers dismounted and lifted Jean from her horse. Three or four hounds rushed out from under the house and barked; he spoke roughly to them, and kicked them right and left with his heavy boots.

As they entered the cabin, a woman who was seated beside the fire, looked up, hope and expectancy quivering in her face. On her lap lay a child with his head propped against her arm. His little face was pinched and livid; the up-turned pupils revealed by the half open lids gave a ghastly expression, which was increased by the slight dropping of the lower jaw. The muscles were relaxed, and the boy lay as one dead, save that occasionally a tremor passed over the body, and the lower lip quivered with the rapid, almost imperceptible breathing.

"How is he?" The father spoke huskily and advanced into the room.

"Powerful low. Ther breath is thar an' thet's all. I'm 'feard he can't hold out much longer. Whar's ther doctor? Couldn't you-un find him? Whar is he?" Her voice was sharp with anxiety; her eyes explored the space beyond the door.

Jean came forward and bent over the child. "I have come," she said simply. "Don't be frightened any more. I know what to do, and I can save him. You may trust me."

The woman moved aside, and her eyes sought counsel of her husband. He bent down and whis-

pered in her ear. Then he raised himself up and said aloud :

“Don’t hinder her none. Give her her way with ther boy. Thet war a true word she spoke just now. We-uns kin trust her ; she have set her hand to her father’s work.”

CHAPTER IV.

IN times past, Melrose had been a place of some importance. It had been the county-seat and had boasted a good-looking court-house with a box cupola that had a bell in it in lieu of a town clock, and a broad green in front, with trees under which men could lounge in summer-weather and trade horses, expectorate tobacco-juice, and discuss the affairs of state and nation.

Of this court-house Melrose had been proud, and of the dignity accruing from its possession, and the more because a rival village, not seven miles away, had sought to wrest it from her. It had been done on the shabby and insufficient plea that Winston—the other village—was more centrally located and more accessible; and the Winstonites had not scrupled to throw up to the Melrose people the fact that the highway leading to that place received so little care as to be, in winter, well-nigh impassable. The accusation had been an injustice, for no less than once in every year a posse of men had been commissioned by the county, and even set to work, to drag fallen branches from the road and to shovel dirt from the *hill-sides* over all the dangerous places. It

after that, Providence should send rain that washed the dirt away, and wind that tore more branches down, whose fault was it? To murmur at such things, showed lack of reverence for higher powers. It was unneighborly besides, and well-nigh unfilial, for Winston had been, in a measure, settled by Melrose men, and had always been regarded by Melrose as an offshoot from her.

That this place should set up as a rival and seek to wrest importance from her, brought home to Melrose that truth anent the foes of one's own household, and she had sturdily bidden the other village to mind her own concerns and devoted the people thereof individually and collectively to the devil.

This position Melrose had held with fine effect because of the court-house building, for it is an easier matter to jump a horse over a fallen tree or a gullied place, or even to skirt around them, than it is to vote good money out of one's own pocket for the erection of new buildings. So for years the matter remained untouched, save by intemperate language.

The office of county clerk in days gone by was one of more honor than emolument, and it rather had to be forced upon a man than ever sought out by him.

At the time when the feeling between the two villages had reached high-water mark, the office *had been held by a man called Shandy Jenkins,*

the owner of a trading store and keeper of a bar-room. It was said by those well qualified to judge, that Shandy was fond of the taste of his own good liquor ; but he was an accommodating man who gave long credit and never pushed a customer, so long as he dealt at no other store ; and nobody wanted the place, so Shandy had been allowed to do the work and carry the court-house key despite his well-known failing.

But one sad night this confidence had been ill rewarded, for Shandy, having a marriage license to prepare for a mountaineer who would be after it by day-break in the morning, repaired to the court-house after dark and took his pipe along for company, and a bottle of "Old Virginia Glades" to keep the draughts from striking in. The combination had proved disastrous, for in the middle of the night the good folks of Melrose had been aroused by a glare like that of a volcano, and the crash of falling timber, and hurrying abroad in costumes incomplete, under the impression that Mother Shipton's vaticination was about to be verified, had beheld their importance crumble to ashes with their building.

The matter had made a local stir ; but the people had felt charitably regarding poor Shandy, for a man may be said to have spiked the gun of censure when, in working harm to the public weal, he contrives to work still greater harm to his person. The villagers had exhumed the

clerk's remains and buried them with care, and they had treated his memory with fairness, even while disputing his accounts with his executor.

During the year it had taken Melrose to realize the disaster, and turn over in her mind a remedy for it, Mr. John Winthrop, the legal bulwark of the place, had kept such county papers as accumulated in the left hand corner of his desk, and his own breeches pocket. This answered well enough and Melrose was content; but in the meanwhile there had come to the rival village a pestilential politician with expansive views and an eye to votes and interest. This interloper, with intent to make himself of importance, had drawn together smoldering brands of discontent and fanned them to a flame. In Mr. Winthrop's method of caring for county interests, he beheld what he considered his opportunity, and had thrown himself upon it, and caught it by the nape of the neck and so flourished it in the face of the Legislature that, before the Melrose people, unaccustomed to impetuosity, could realize their danger, far less provide against it, the county government had been removed to Winston.

After this, Melrose had slumbered until the discovery of the value of cotton-seed-oil had induced a Huntsville firm, who owned property in the place, to establish an oil-mill there on account of the water-power, the facilities for *getting seed* and the cheapness of the labor.

This had given an impulse to Melrose, and brought some strangers to it—the farmer from Vermont, and also Dr. Ravenel.

In spite, however, of the prospects which its future was supposed to hold, Melrose offered so little inducement to professional men that there was but one lawyer in the place and he had been born and raised there. This was Clive Winthrop, a son of the man whose use of his breeches-pocket as a clerk's office had given dissatisfaction. He was a man of fifty, or thereabout, tall, well-made and handsome, and the fact that his hair and mustache were iron-gray, and the additional fact that he was a widower did not detract from his advantages in the eyes of the Melrose ladies. The former was considered picturesque, and the latter—ah, well, poor man; he had known the comfort of a home and it was pitiful to think of him in that great house alone. The house in question was the handsomest in Melrose and there were no second-hand children in it, to be either bane or comfort, so the ladies were justified in being *very* sorry for Clive Winthrop.

But the years went on, and Clive Winthrop failed to evolve a proper sympathy for himself, and certainly made no effort to dispel his loneliness in the way society expects of all right-minded widowers. He had been in love with his wife, and she had died young, which made a halo around her memory.

Winthrop was no monogamist; few men are, and it was perhaps quite as much the effect of circumstances as of individual constancy that he had remained a widower for fifteen years. His life moved on in the same groove: he saw only the women to whom he had all his life been accustomed, he had an excellent housekeeper, and he was fond of learned pursuits. After the death of his wife he went among his neighbors as he had done before, and was gentle and courteous as a strong man must be who has known sorrow as well as joy and been mellowed by the experience.

But while he had much patient tenderness for women, nearly fifteen years passed by before a second woman separated herself from the aggregate and unified, as it were, for him, all womanhood in an individual.

The miracle was wrought one summer evening early in the year whose covers were to close on the final chapters of a good man's life. Winthrop had walked out to Dr. Monteith's, as was his habit; for the men were friends. After sunset, they moved their chairs on the veranda and lit their pipes, and Jean came out and seated herself on the step and rested her head against her father's knee. The air was still and translucent, so that the stars looked near and brilliant; night insects jarred and hummed amid the branches and, in dusky places, fire-flies flashed like jewels; *the moon, newly risen*, sent a pure white ray on

an exploring expedition into the shadow of the veranda, where it found and brought to view a noble face and soft gray eyes and two small hands lightly folded together. Presently the doctor asked her to sing to them, and Jean, without changing her position, sang an old Scotch air that had in it the echo of the hills and the breath of the heather. Her voice was one of those rare, tender contraltos, that vibrate through the listener and set his nerves to thrilling. Winthrop had not heard her sing for a long time, and somehow, there seemed to be a new tone in her voice, and his eyes sought her face, and, all at once, as a man stumbles on a great discovery, he realized that the child he had been used to all her life had, in some strange way, developed into quite a different order of being.

Then, with man's appropriateness, his mind worked backward seeking to establish a connection between Jean's past and present, which should identify her in some way with himself, bring her into a position in which the reflex of the emotions he felt stirring within him might possibly touch her. She had always been a reserved, strong-natured child, who kept her feelings to herself, or else let them out in a flood. His wife had been intimate with Jean's mother and had made a pet of the child. He was glad of that, although he could not exactly define why he should be. Then a little incident recurred to him.

Jean had been six years old when Mrs. Winthrop died, and the day after the funeral her mammy had taken her into the village. At the gate of the big brown house, at which she was in the habit of stopping, the little maid had halted.

"I'm going in to see Lita," she announced, for so she always called her friend.

Then mammy had explained to her that "Lita" was dead; that she could not go in, she would be in the way, and had sought to draw her on. But Jean, to whom the word "death," as yet, conveyed no image, had turned a deaf ear, evaded mammy's detaining hand, scrambled over the fence and sped across the yard before her design could be frustrated. The door was on the latch, and she had gone straight to Mrs. Winthrop's room. It had looked dark and deserted at first, but soon her eyes had fallen on Mr. Winthrop sitting by his wife's little work-table with his head down on his folded arms. The child had gone to him at once.

"What's the matter?" she had asked; "where's my Lita?"


There had been no answer, only a movement of the broad shoulders and a quivering of the hands. A drawer in the table was half-open and in it Jean could see little folded garments, like dolls' clothes, some finished, some still unmade, and on the top a tiny gown with a needle sticking in it.

Jean had looked at him a moment and then, obeying the instinct that was in her, had climbed up in a chair and drawn the bowed head to her little bosom.

CHAPTER V.

THE Rev. Arthur Tinsley had gravitated to Melrose through sheer inability to look out for his own material interests, and also, perhaps, through a mental peculiarity which led him to regard the field as of more importance than the fodder. Melrose was an undesirable parish for a liberal-minded man; there was in it a wearisome, contracted element, hide-bound by ancient modes of thought, yet holding itself competent at any moment to set the whole world straight and mete to each his heaven-appointed duty.

Mr. Tinsley was a liberal man—too liberal for those among his flock who loved judgment more than mercy. They complained that the mantle of his charity was not only broad enough to cover the just, but that it had a margin for the shelter of the unjust as well. This, by some, was regarded as condoning felony, for, unconsciously to them, their thoughts were ruled by Mosaic rather than Christian law, and their minds dwelt much on sonorous sentences of denunciation. They liked their doctrine steaming hot, and the devil kept well in the foreground; and their pastor *insisted on giving* them, week after week, sermons



filled with love and mercy and duty to one's neighbor, and kept the "wrath of God" clean out of sight, and ignored the devil for months together.


"Ther parson's er easy-goin' chap," remarked old Jack Johns to his tavern cronies. "He don't look ter be no mor'n able ter heist er gun up ter his shoulder; but he shoots right straight arter he gits it thar, and I'll be damned ef he ain't broke down ther old monopoly. Ef he keeps on hoein' ther row he's in, God A'mighty 'll git sech a big say-so in ther country thet ther devil 'll hev ter refugee."

"He air a luke-warm shepherd I'm afeard," groaned Aaron Spot, the bar-room keeper. "He don't keep ther fence up twix' sheep and goats, an' he does like he 'lowed the same pas'ter war sot fur 'em both. When ther Marster comes ter reckon up He'll find things mightily messed up in ther perrish. All ther bottom rails will be 'lowin' that ef they ain't on top they ought to be. Ez er *man*, I ain't got nary rock ter fling at Parson Tinsley; but ez er preacher he's slack—pow'rful slack to be sho'." Aaron spoke regretfully. He loved the crack of the doctrinal whip and to fancy that he could see his neighbors dodging.

Old Jack grinned. He knew that Spot adulterated his liquor by every art known to man, even after it had undergone that process at the hands of the larger dealers. It was more than whispered

too, that Aaron had "moonlight" dealings away in the laurel brakes in the fastness of the mountains; but he was a good church member, well-primed with controversial texts, and his eye was single towards the phylacteries and the street corners. Old Jack himself was no better than one of the wicked. He drank like a whale, whenever any one would trust him, and denounced his enemies with the vigor of a psalmist; his word could not be considered as equivalent to his bond; but he was patient and tender with his rheumatic old wife and would go without food and drink any time himself so that she might have the few comforts that she needed. He had saved a life or two in his time, and his cabin was the refuge of the maimed and homeless curs of the district. Jack knew that the savor of him might be questionable in some nostrils and that he was counted a goat of the goatiest description; but that Aaron Spot should hold himself a ram meet for the altar struck him as being comical.

When he had enjoyed the joke in secret, he put in a plea for the censured preacher. "Deal back ther kyerds like he deals 'em ter you," he remonstrated, "to do no other ain't got fa'rness in it. Ef he jedjes we-un easy, like a gentleman, we-un air bound ter judge him easy likewise. Folks whar keers ter look kin find most any sort o' grain inside ther Bible. Every mill grinds it out *ter suit tharselves*: some gives it clean and sweet,



an' some runs in grit an' sawdust. *I* like ther taste o' Parson Tinsley's meal myself—it sets easy on my stomach an' it never gripes none. Some folks like ter see thar naybors doubled up ; but I never did hanker arter pain fur livin' creeters. Happen Parson knows that he's about most ez good as we-un kin teach him."

As not infrequently happens, Mrs. Tinsley was, in many things, the antipodes of her husband, and even twenty years of married life had not appreciably decreased the distance. She was an energetic woman ; so much so that her own life was too small to hold her and she was constantly overflowing into the lives of other people. She was good-hearted, in a way, and never spared herself, and if the services she sought to render sometimes failed of being the comfort she was convinced they would be, the fault could not be credited to lack of good intention. She liked to manage, and thought that she could manage well, and no devotee ever believed in the pope's infallibility with more absolute faith than she believed in her own.

The person whose affairs most occupied her mind just now, was Jean Monteith's, and, out of the abundance of her ability, she set to work to rearrange the girl's life for her.

"You know, Arthur," she remarked to her husband as they sat together by the parlor fire, "that it will be impossible for that poor child to

live any length of time as she is doing. Just think of her being way out in that lonely house virtually alone! It isn't at all the proper thing for a young woman, and after awhile people will begin to talk. Nobody has said much yet, for the doctor hasn't been dead ten days and some of us have been out there most of the time; but Miss Elsworth was asking me this afternoon what Jean's plans were. She thinks, and I think too, that some one ought to talk them over with the child and make suggestions to her. I think I'll walk over there to-morrow. Of course nobody has said any thing to Jean yet, for she has scarcely talked at all since her father's death; she has just gone on in the old routine in a sort of dream and she will continue to go on so for months if somebody doesn't interfere and remind her that there is such a thing in the world as gossip. Yes, I'd better go, I reckon, for, as Maria Elsworth says, I certainly am the proper person."

Mr. Tinsley put down his book and reached over to the tobacco-box for his pipe.

"Where's Winthrope?" he asked, as he filled it. "I thought he was her trustee or guardian or something, and would arrange her matters for her."

Mrs. Tinsley raised her eye-brows, was there *ever* any thing like the obtuseness of men?

"Don't you know that Clive Winthrope is in love with her?" she queried; "or people say that *he is, which in the eyes of the world ties his hands*

just as completely. What possible suggestions can he make except such as would be out of the question while her mourning is fresh. He can manage her business for her, but he isn't likely to meddle with her domestic affairs yet awhile."

The minister failed to see the force of this feminine logic. It seemed to him that if a man took sufficient interest in a woman to want her for his wife, he might venture to advise her on a good many points, particularly if he should be double her age.

"Yes," repeated the lady, "I'll walk up there this afternoon and have a talk with Jean. I do hope that the doctor hasn't bound her by any sort of promise about the house—or—or—the other thing. If he should have, of course Jean must get some respectable settled-woman to live with her. I wonder who she can get? The doctor was almost alone in the world—only some far-off cousins that I ever heard of. Her mother may have had some kin, and if so 'twould be better for Jean to be under the care of a woman of her own blood. I'll find out about it so that we may write. If there isn't any one, I think she could get Miss Parma Wright."

Mr. Tinsley groaned. Even his charity had limits.

"What's that for?" demanded his wife; "Miss Parma is the quintessence of respectability."

"And of malice and all uncharitableness," retorted the minister. "I don't want to be uncharitable

myself; but really, Margaret, I'd as soon clap a fly-blister on a sore place as recommend Miss Wright to Jean. She'd wear the child out, body and soul, and never see that she was doing it. That tongue of hers is enough to put an able-bodied *man* in his grave in a week, and for a girl like Jean!—Good God!”

“She isn't so bad as that, Arthur; you exaggerate. She would be as good as gold to Jean, and of course I only mention her as a *dernier ressort*. Jean isn't like other girls either; her head is so filled with science and stuff that Parma's talk will be like wind among the branches—she'll never even hear half of it.”

The door opened and Maud Tinsley came in with her hat and gloves in her hand. Her beautiful face was glowing from the cold outside, and her eyes were lustrous. Both parents looked up with interest and admiration; she was their one ewe lamb, and she was fair to look upon.

Maud was brimming with intelligence of some sort, and began to overflow before she had fairly reached the hearth-rug.

“What do you think has happened, mother?” pushing a chair forward and sinking into it; “the whole village is talking about it. I was at Miss Parma Wright's just now, and she had been talking it over with Miss Elsworth and both of them were full of it. It seems that old Jack Johns let *it out at the Black Bear* last night and it's all over

town this morning. Jack had it from a mountaineer, named Danvers, and they both thought it the finest thing that ever was. Miss Parma says she never heard of such a thing in her life; she is quite scandalized."

"What about?" questioned Mrs. Tinsley eagerly; "what has happened? I haven't heard a breath of any thing unusual."

Maud laughed. "And I began my story at the wrong end," said she; "of course you are in the dark. It's Jean Monteith they were talking about."

"What's the matter? What's she been doing?"

"The story runs this way—at least Miss Parma tells it so: It seems that the very day poor Dr. Monteith was buried, or rather late that night, a man came for him. Think of that!—after he had been buried! Nobody heard the man knock except Jean, who was in the study. His child was ill—dying, he said. Would you believe it, Jean went with him *herself*! Made him saddle her father's horses and took his medicines and things and rode miles and miles alone with a strange man, in the night, away to some cabin in the mountains, heaven knows *where*! Wasn't it awful? Just think of riding all that distance and undertaking to treat a sick child! Miss Parma says 'twas the most reckless thing *she* ever heard of, and a clear tempting of Providence."

"To *what*?" queried the minister tentatively;

"not surely to send harm upon her. It looks to me more like *trusting* Providence."

But the ladies were too much interested in Jean's adventure to trouble themselves with metaphysical distinctions, or such subtleties as the identification of a thought with an expression. The minister's implied exoneration of the higher powers from malevolence fell on heedless ears.

"Why didn't she send the man on for Theodore?" demanded Mrs. Tinsley. "What induced her to go herself?"

"What makes Jean *always* do things different from other people? She's eccentric, mother, and she always has been. Any other girl would have sent the man on at once, therefore it would be the last thing that would occur to Jean. She knows all about drugs and physics: the doctor taught her, and she hasn't a nerve in her body. I remember that once when we were children, a lot of us went out to Dr. Monteith's to play. Jean was thirteen and she never played with us much, although she was good-natured about her things. That evening we were swinging, and Willie Price, the awkwardest boy that ever was born, contrived to tumble out of the swing and break his arm. We were all scared to death and most of us cried; but Jean picked him up and carried him in the house and called her mammy to hold him while *she set his arm*. The doctor came in while *she was doing it*, and just stood by and let

her. Fancy her having the nerve! I nearly fainted!"

"Jean Monteith is a big woman," observed Mr. Tinsley with decision; "about the biggest woman I know."

Maud opened her eyes. "Why, father, she don't come up to my shoulder, any thing like, and I don't believe she weighs a hundred pounds."

Maud was a literal young woman; she took things at face value.

"There's more kinds of bigness than bulk of matter, daughter," the minister said; "and Jean's spirit can look over all our heads. It was big to set that boy's arm, and I call what she did the other night uncommonly big."

Mrs. Tinsley moved impatiently; this husband of hers would never look at things from a conventional standpoint, or realize that there are certain proprieties that must and ought to be observed, or trouble will come of it.

"It would have been big if there had been any necessity for it," she observed; "but as Dr. Ravenel was right here in the village, there was no necessity, so the whole thing was Quixotic and ridiculous. That's the worst of a girl having been raised entirely by a man; she gets the haziest notions of what society has a right to expect of her, and often no notion at all. Sara Monteith wasn't much: a dreamy, invalidish sort of woman;

but, on Jean's account, it's a thousand pities she should have died."

"What was the matter with the boy?" inquired Mr. Tinsley, willing to create a diversion.

"I don't know exactly," Maud answered. "I met Theodore Ravenel after I left Miss Parma's, and we talked about it. He said that the child had never properly recovered from typhoid fever, and that it was probably a relapse. The children had been playing in the snow, and then they ate pop-corn; and Theodore says that either would have been sufficient to bring on convulsions in little Ferg's weak condition. He wanted to explain it to me, and began about the pneumogastric nerve, and cerebral irritation, and rush of blood to the brain producing pressure and unconsciousness, and a lot more. I didn't understand half of it; only it sounded so learned and complicated that I kept wondering all the time how Jean could dare to take the responsibility of a serious case like that. I don't think women have any business meddling with men's work."

"The result in this instance demonstrates the weakness of your position, my dear," commented the minister dryly. "Knowledge and self-reliance are good things at times—even in women. If Jean hadn't understood the relation of the pneumogastric nerve to an indigestible substance in *the stomach*, and been brave enough to defy *conventional*ity, and apply her knowledge to the case

in question, it is probable that I should now be saying 'dust to dust, and ashes to ashes' over the mortal part of little Ferg Danvers. Jean is a *rara avis*; it's a pity she can't be duplicated indefinitely. What did Ravenel say about her treatment? It was apt to have been clever."

Maud's brow clouded. She did not approve of what Jean had done at all, and thought that her conduct should be discussed with uplifted hands and brows, if not openly reprobated. It had been so unnecessary, with Ravenel in the village. And that night-ride through the lonely forest: the very thought of it sent a shudder through Maud's well-ordered being. Of course it would have been dreadful if the boy had died; but there was Theodore—and after all life and death were in the hands of Providence. No; Maud could not understand a woman—a lady—doing the thing that Jean had done.

When her father repeated his question as to Jean's treatment of the case, she replied coldly:

"He did not say; he had not seen the child. I asked him if the treatment would be difficult, and he said not at all; that the first requisite would be a hot bath and an emetic, and after that perfect quiet and careful nursing. Any body could have done it; but I suppose if it had been a difficult surgical case Jean would have undertaken it all the same. Jean never stops to think."

"Jean is going to get herself talked about, you

may mark my words," interposed Mrs. Tinsley. "She is always doing unaccountable things. During her father's life it didn't matter so much; he was there to back her up, as it were. Now it does matter, and matters a great deal. People always persecute that which they don't understand. What did Theodore say about this escapade of Jean's? Did he make any comment?"

"He joked about the 'rival practitioner,' and said he had a great mind to nip opposition in the bud by proposing a partnership. When I told him what a fancy Jean has for physic, and how different she is from other girls, and eccentric and all that, he laughed and said 'some women had a yearning to wear spurs.' I couldn't get at his real opinion—Theodore hates to blame any body—but I inferred from his manner that he thought Jean should not have gone that night."

"That just proves what I've been saying all along," repeated Mrs. Tinsley. "Jean will get herself into some outrageous mess, and be horribly misunderstood, if somebody doesn't take steps to prevent it. She needs some one to take care of her, if ever a girl did in this world."

The minister sighed and gazed into the fire.

"Yes," he assented slowly, "she certainly needs some one to take care of her. Poor little Jean!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN the South, as a rule, women are still reared in the circumscribed manner peculiar to the days that are being more and more numbered with things past. With them wifehood and motherhood is the end for which creatures feminine are born. There is no gainsaying this, for it is a grand truth and in universal order; but the Southern grasp of the subject, being simple instinct, lacks comprehensiveness. Deep knowledge and broad views, they hold, will unfit a woman for her duty, will unsettle her nature, and, perhaps, her faith. Thought, study and the vast things of existence are for men, and for women—their hearts must teach them all things needful. Full recognition of the fact that the more finely finished is the instrument, the more perfect will be the music, is among the lessons that the future holds for Southern people.

Jean had had a strange up-bringing for a Southern woman. The doctor had educated his daughter himself, and had taken delight in the task; but, being left to his own guidance, he had given her nearly the same course of instruction he would have given a son. Nearly, not quite,

for the doctor shared, in a measure, the conservatism of his people. Jean's decided bent toward his own profession, her intelligence and vivid interest had led him on, unconsciously, to giving her a fuller knowledge of the physical sciences than he, perhaps, intended, or was aware of. But there was ingrained in his nature a certain reverence, an inherited adherence to old world notions relative to distinctions of sex which made him feel that a woman should be kept, as much as may be, apart from the hard realities of life.

This had led the doctor into a natural, inevitable blunder. What he had taught Jean, he had taught her thoroughly ; but he had picked about and chosen ; taking her with him only just so far ; shutting a door here, and a door there, lest too close contact with material things should brush the bloom from his child's nature. Thus while Jean could have passed a creditable examination in some departments of her father's profession, in others her knowledge was of the twilight sort which limits and obscures vision.

For the work to which Jean had set her hand, no state of affairs could have been more unfortunate ; for the second part of the doctor's book required for its completion, not only profound and thorough knowledge ; but also diversified practical experience. And Jean, out of her love, *out of* her hope and pitiful inexperience, had *determined to finish the book herself*. Her

father's suggestion that she should give the work into the hands of a man competent to finish it, she set aside: it is doubtful whether she heeded it at the time; it is certain that afterward it utterly lapsed from her consciousness.

The pledge she had given her father involved, to her mind, not the seeing that his work was well done, which was all that he had dreamed of requiring, but the doing it herself. By some feminine logic she had demonstrated to herself that as *she* was a part of him, the work completed by her hand would be as absolutely *his* as though completed by his own. The book, so finished, could be given to the world under his name alone.

Poor little Jean! She did not in the least realize the nature of the task before her, and she settled herself to it with hope and courage. Her time was at her own disposal, little trammelled by domestic cares or social duties, and life in the lonely house flowed on as it had always done, with no change save increase of loneliness.

She had stoutly refused to give up her home, or to get a duenna, or to make any changes whatsoever. Her mammy could take care of her. She did not want a stranger in the house; it would be a trouble, not a comfort, and to the surprise of every one Winthrop stood by her in the determination.

They had examined the doctor's desk, and Win-

thrope had read a long letter addressed to himself, and they had talked awhile, those two, alone in the study together, and Jean had made him understand her position and he had bidden her to please herself in all things, for no one had any right to interfere. Then he had taken her hands in his and looked down at her wistfully; it seemed pitiful to him that she should be left there alone; but he did not say so, for that would involve the saying of other things for which the time had not come. She should have her way, he swore to himself, and he would watch over her from a distance, and after awhile she would not be averse to change, and all things would seem natural to her.

And being an earnest, large-natured man, and a trifle absent-minded, he took little thought of what people might say, despite his professional knowledge of what an important factor gossip has always been in human history.

The village was scandalized and curious, and elated, for Jean's determination opened endless vistas of gossip and conjecture. Her thoughts, motives, and probable occupations were canvassed with the acumen and truth usually reserved for the records of political aspirants, and, at social gatherings, when the weather, and gowns, and babies had been exhausted, and conversation threatened to stagnate, some one had only to mention Jean Monteith and it straightway became flowing.

Mrs. Tinsley was indignant with Jean and

could hardly think of her with patience. She had gone to see Jean, as she had promised herself, and had shown her what would be expected of her. She had talked—drawing from the rhetorical well until her bucket smote upon the bottom ; but all to no purpose. Jean had been courteous and gentle, but she had held to her point, that she was quite competent to manage her life without outside interference, and, after an hour or two, Mrs. Tinsley had left the house in a fret ; but forgiving her “as a Christian.”

“She’s as obstinate as a mule, that Jean Monteith,” she affirmed to Dr. Ravenel, too irritated to seek for originality in simile, “as obstinate as *ten* mules rolled into one. I never saw such a girl ! I’ve talked until I’m exhausted and have put the matter before her in the very strongest light, and I might as well have been trying to beat down Gibraltar with a cork hammer for all the impression I’ve made.”

Dr. Ravenel dismounted, strung the bridle on his arm and walked on beside her. He had overtaken her a few yards beyond the Monteiths’ gate.

“A ten-mule power of obstinacy is considerable to credit one small woman with,” he remarked pleasantly.

“She’s no more like a woman than I’m like an obelisk. There’s nothing soft or dependent about her,” fumed Mrs. Tinsley ; “she makes her own

plans without consulting a creature, and she sticks to them like resin. I *do* like to see a woman gentle and submissive."

Mrs. Tinsley had never been either herself, nor was she conscious of her deficiency.

Dr. Ravenel smiled.

"So do I," he assented. "What do the copy-books say?—'Gentleness is the noblest quality a woman or a horse can possess,' something like that, I think. Now what is this revolutionary young woman going to do?"

"Nothing. And that's just the trouble," responded the irritated matron, and, full of her grievance, she poured it forth in a flood.

It was provoking. When a woman has been gifted with a fine power of management and really takes trouble to make suitable arrangements for her neighbors, the least they can do is to adopt them. Mrs. Tinsley, with the waste of her pearls grinding into her, talked on and on in a torrent; and by the time she had reached her own front gate, she had contrived, without malevolent intention, to give the young man at her side some very singular ideas anent Jean Monteith.

CHAPTER VII.

DR. RAVENEL'S office was in a small one-story building that stood back from the street in a little yard. Three wooden steps led up to the door, which opened into a small room sparsely furnished. This was the office proper; beyond it was a comfortable apartment used as a sitting-room, and beyond again, was the doctor's chamber.

One bright April morning Jean Monteith opened the gate of the little yard and ascended the office steps. She was in deep mourning, and there was something pathetic about the small figure shrouded in its heavy veil. Her knock was answered by an elderly colored woman, who, as is usual in country communities where every body, white and black, knows every body else, spoke familiarly.

"Good-mornin', Miss Jean! I hope t'aint nobody sick up at yo' house—yer mammy, nor nobody. Will yer walk in?"

Jean entered while replying to the woman's greeting. "Is Dr. Ravenel at home?" she asked, putting aside her veil.

"No'm. I'se monst'us sorry. He ain't gone

far tho', an' he's walkin', so he won't be long. He jes' stepped roun' ter Mrs. Simpson's ter see how dey all was gittin' 'long. He was dar mos' all night las' night. Dar's er bran' new young lady come dar."

Jean evinced a woman's interest in the news, and asked a question or two relative to the case. The lady had been "pow'rful low; but Dr. Ravenel had fetched her thru all right, an' she was doin' toler'ble—she an' de baby too. He war er mighty smart doctor, folks said *now*, tho' dey had been so sot agin him at fus'."

"Would he be long?" Jean asked again, and again received the assurance that he "wouldn't be no time hardly." She would wait then instead of leaving a message.

The woman bustled about and did the honors.

"Don't set out here, Miss Jean. Dese here cheers is mo' comfortabler to look at den to set down on. Dey's got mighty 'stressful backs—don't fit nobody no better'n er bar'l stave. Come in de settin'-room," and she ushered Jean into the inner apartment, got her a fan and a glass of water, and finally left her after repeating the assurance that the period of waiting could not exceed ten minutes.

Jean glanced curiously around the room. It was carpeted and the windows were curtained; the recesses by the fire-place were filled on the *one side by a handsome book-case*, on the other

by an old oak press with solid doors. In the middle of the room was an office table with drawers and little cabinets. It was littered with books, papers, and writing materials in the orderly confusion which students love, and in the midst stood a blue plush photograph frame, the face within hidden by tiny doors. The walls were adorned with whips, spurs, guns and fishing-tackle, and over the mantel was the portrait of a very beautiful woman in an old-fashioned gown.

The chamber door was partly open and from where she sat in Dr. Ravenel's big chair, Jean could see a coat thrown on the foot of the bed, a pair of muddy boots in the corner beyond, and on a table some clever looking trout flies, with materials for making more. The atmosphere of the place pleased Jean, it was vigorous and manly; she was glad of this glimpse into the arcana of Dr. Ravenel's life and thought it probable that he would understand and help her. She needed help, for a sense of her incompetence for the work she had undertaken was growing in her. And she needed understanding, because she had no intention of bestowing her full confidence. She only meant to solicit aid to get the better of her ignorance. That she might be going to do an unconventional thing never occurred to Jean. Her life had been primitive in its simplicity and her lack of worldly knowledge was almost beyond belief.

When she had needed any thing she had always gone to a man, her father, to have the want supplied; and in her mind manhood was synonymous with helpfulness. Youth and age were abstract terms as yet, and the fact that Dr. Ravenel was under thirty and she herself not twenty-one, lay outside of Jean's consciousness. To Jean, engrossed with one idea, the matter resolved itself into this—she needed help, Dr. Ravenel was the only man within reach who could give her the help, therefore she had come to him. If there is any sixth sense that teaches a woman the conventionalities by instinct, Jean had been born without it.

Growing weary of inaction, she went to the window and stood, half hidden by the curtain, looking out. Presently the colored woman passed with a pitcher in her hand and went over to a neighbor's. Miss Parma Wright came by and glanced at the doctor's window; Jean's shoulder and part of her gown were visible, and Miss Parma craned her neck trying to make out who it could be. Two men hurried along the road; one, a big, bearded fellow, had his arm wrapped up in a woman's shawl, and his companion half led, half supported him. They paused at the doctor's gate, which the well man kicked open with his foot, entered, and ascended the steps. They were workmen from the oil-mill and Jean *guessed at once* that there had been an accident,

They knocked, but no one answered, so, after a moment, Jean went to the door herself.

The wounded man was leaning against the house-side, sick and faint.

"Is ther doctor in, marm?" inquired the other touching his hat. "Tom, here, hev got er mighty bad arm, an' he 'lows he'd like ter git it fixed ef so be it's convenient. He got it caught in er wheel down thar," nodding in the direction of the oil-mill, "an' it's pow'rful mashed up."

"Bring him in," said Jean; "the doctor isn't here, but he is expected every minute. No: not here—bring him into the inner room where he can be made more comfortable."

She led the way into the sitting-room, the men following, and pointed to the big chair. Both men were strangers to her, but the younger one had a pleasant face and voice. The man called Tom dropped heavily into the proffered seat and groaned impatiently. His face looked ghastly through the layers of smut and oil, and he moistened his dry lips with his tongue. Jean went into the inner room and brought him a cup of water. He drank eagerly; but as her hand touched his, he looked up and said, "Be keerful o' ther oil, marm, I'm feared my clothes will sile yers."

Jean smiled, "No matter," she said gently, and wiped his face with her handkerchief; "is the pain very bad?"

He nodded. "I kin b'ar it," he said briefly, and closed his eyes.

His pallor deepened, and Jean made the other man help her lower the back of the chair. Then she sent him away with instructions to hunt all over the place for Dr. Ravenel and bring him home at once.

The man started, then looked back and hesitated. "I don't like to leave yer, marm. He mout swooned or something an' you'd be skeered. The doctor'd think hard of me!"

"No, he won't," said Jean peremptorily. "Go at once. The man's in agony. I'm not afraid."

Moment followed moment. Jean had thrown aside her veil and bent over the man, doing what she could. She had found some brandy in the doctor's room and she moistened his lips with it from time to time.

The gate slammed; a man's footsteps sounded in the outer room and Dr. Ravenel entered. He was alone—the workman had missed him; but he took in the situation at a glance, bowed to Jean, and came at once to the patient's side.

He betrayed no surprise at Jean's presence in his private rooms, although he was filled with wonder how she could have come there. Jean moved aside and briefly told him of the accident.

Dr. Ravenel drew what looked to be a solid wooden cabinet from the wall, opened the folding

top and developed it into an operating table. On to this he helped the patient and then unfastened the shawl. Some one, at the time of the accident, had had sense enough to bind a handkerchief around the arm close to the shoulder, and to tighten it with a bit of wood. The bleeding had been checked, but the arm from the elbow down was a sorry sight—a mangled mass of flesh and bones and cloth all crushed together.

The doctor looked round.

“Miss Monteith,” he said, “will you be good enough to go to the back door and call Hannah? I need her.”

“She has gone out,” Jean answered. “I saw her pass the window. What do you want? I will help you.”

“Thank you. Can you hold the arm a moment—in this position, while I get the things? No: stop—the sight of it may turn you faint! Here, put your fingers in my vest pocket—left side—that’s it—the key of the press is there. You’ll find the instruments and bandages on the lower shelf. Bring them here.”

He bent over the patient again with a bottle and sponge in his hand; he was administering the chloroform. Jean did as she was bidden, putting the things he would need in place with an air of having always done it. Ravenel nodded approval; his surprise at finding her there had vanished and

he issued his orders as coolly as if she had been a regular assistant.

"Thank you. Now some water and another sponge. You'll find both in the other room."

The man breathed quietly, and the lines of pain were smoothing out; the drug had done its work. Ravenel cut away the woolen shirt from the shoulder.

"Must it come off?"

Jean's voice was pitiful, but quiet; she must have wonderful nerve he thought, and a thrill of admiration touched him.

"Yes," he said presently, "and it would be better to have it over at once. Do you think you could stand it? You'll have to hold the arm, I'm afraid. If you think it will be too much for you, say so. I can wait for Hannah. He isn't suffering now. Don't stay if you think you can't stand it."

He had heard a good deal about this young woman, and some things that had sounded queer in the telling. He had a mind to test the stuff she was made of.

Jean looked at him gravely.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "I will help you."

She had taken off her gloves and her hands looked white and slim; he hated to see them touch the mangled flesh; but they did not tremble. She placed herself as he directed and *responded to his every sign with that instant*

obedience which is the soul of helpfulness. Her eyes followed, unfalteringly, every movement of the firm, dextrous hands, every change of position of the lithe figure. Once he glanced into the small face and noticed that it was white to the lips, the grating of the saw jarred on her nerves and set them vibrating. It was ugly music.

"This thing is too much for you," he said, "you are a woman."

And she answered, "Yes; but I can stand it. Go on; I won't fail you," and handed him, herself, the instrument to secure an artery.

When the operation was over and the patient had been made comfortable, and the other man, who had returned anxious and perspiring to report his failure to find the doctor, had been dispatched for assistance and a stretcher, Dr. Ravenel put Jean into a chair, got her a glass of wine and stood over her while she drank it. He praised her too, heartily and openly as he would have praised a child who had done a brave thing. She was so small and white and self-contained that nothing about her roused within him the instinct that she was a woman. Had she been a boy his care of her could not have been more emotionless.

"You've got your nervous system well in hand," he smiled. "I thought you were going to faint once, and was prepared to dash the basin of bloody water over you, bonnet and all. I should

pronounce the ruler in that small head of yours a bit of an autocrat. Your self-control is wonderful."

Jean looked up at him. "I'm glad," she said, simply, "because then you won't mind, perhaps, having me for a pupil. I want you to teach me anatomy."

Had she said that she wanted him to teach her navigation, or the art of rifling guns, with intent to make practical use of the same, he could scarcely have been more surprised. He could not credit her with being in earnest and had much ado to keep from laughing in her face.

"What do you want to know about that for?" he asked in amusement. "You can't be a doctor—there isn't enough of you. If you've got any romantic notions about being a nurse, in your head, I'd give 'em up if I were you. It takes wars to make Florence Nightingales. There isn't any poetry in the ordinary nurse's life; it's all prose and vilely disagreeable."

He had seated himself on the edge of the table and was giving advice with a freedom which, until an hour ago, his acquaintance with her would not have justified; but cutting off a man's arm together seemed to have brought about a certain degree of intimacy.

Jean shook her head. "No," she said, "I'm not going to be a doctor, or a nurse—at least I've *never thought of being* either. I want to study

anatomy because it will be necessary to me—is necessary to me now. I have work to do that requires thorough knowledge in all branches of the science. The theory I can get from books, but I must study practically—like a man studies—a man who will be a surgeon.”

“What work?” he questioned bluntly. He was beginning to think that she might be in earnest and the thought did not please him.

“That I can not tell you,” she answered, regarding him with grave, wide-open eyes; “with that you would have nothing to do. What I want is that you should give me some lessons, and—and—” hesitating and coloring painfully, “I do not wish to take up your time gratuitously. We would make a business arrangement of course. I could come here, or you could come to me—perhaps the latter would be better, we would be less liable to interruption.”

Dr. Ravenel’s expression changed, settled into gravity dashed with disapproval. This was no whim born of momentary interest, and his own praise; but a settled plan definitely thought out. What work could she possibly have to do which would require a knowledge of surgery? The very idea was preposterous. She must be actuated by a morbid mania for the acquisition of knowledge that could be of no possible use to her. She must be one of those anomalous women who pile up *information* as misers pile up gold for no reason

save its possession. She had distinctly disavowed a practical purpose in the matter, which would have been the only ground on which the faintest desire to help her could have been evolved. Dr. Ravenel had an unreasoning masculine aversion to what he regarded as intellectual gluttony or morbid curiosity. Any course which would culminate in practical, tangible results he could understand and sympathize with, whether he approved it or not ; but any course not so justified made him impatient. And her calm proposal to convert his sitting-room or her own into a lecture hall and dissecting room, mingled a feeling of repulsion with his annoyance. He became all at once conscious of the fact that she was a woman and that he himself was under thirty.

A clock somewhere in the room struck : the breathing of the sleeping man sounded deep and regular. Jean's eyes were fixed on Ravenel. Would he do as she wished ? His face did not look propitious.

"I am not very stupid," she ventured, "and I would try to understand at once and not give unnecessary trouble. My—" she hesitated, with a catch in her breath and changed her sentence. "The only person who ever taught me used to say that I learned rapidly."

Ravenel was touched. "It isn't that," he said, and paused. A vision of Miss Parma and the *other village tabbies*, and the things they would

say and look and insinuate, rose before his mind and turned him sick.

Jean's unconsciousness fairly appalled him. Not an unworthy thought crossed his brain ; he simply wondered over her. What combination of influences had been potent to produce a creature who trusted men and the world with such grand thoroughness? What manner of woman could she be not to realize that other women had tongues and would use them? An emotion akin to pity for her awoke in his breast, and he resolved that in this instance he would stand her friend.

"It's out of the question," he said decidedly. "I haven't the time, nor would I be justified in undertaking a pupil, or pupils. What you want is a course at a Medical College—lectures and all that. There are first-rate women's colleges at the North. I'll find out about them for you if you wish."

"No," Jean answered, "it won't be worth while. I *can't* leave home. There's a reason why I should not. I may not be able to go away for years—perhaps never at all. I must get what I need here, and you are the only man who can help me. Will you?"

Dr. Râvenel frowned ; he hated mystery, and her persistence worried him. He could not explain the position to her ; she ought to know herself that the thing would be impossible.

"It's out of the question," he replied.

"You won't help me?"

"I *can't*. You ought to know that."

"Why?"

He grew desperate. "I can't explain. You ought to know. The thing is altogether impossible."

A slow tide of crimson swept over the pale face, then ebbed, leaving it whiter than ever. Dr. Ravenel felt that he had been a brute; but did not see how he could have helped himself.

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CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER roistering through the mountains, the stream that flowed so sluggishly by Melrose rested itself in a great still pool before passing on to its labors below. This pool was near the pine-woods, beyond which stood Danvers's cabin, and was a lonely spot, weird and beautiful, with the beauty of silence and isolation. Close to its brink stood trees, chestnut, gum and hickory, and under them a tangle of laurel and wild grape-vine clothed the earth, broken here and there by spurs and juts of gray limestone, and by long scars of dull yellowish-red, where the rainfall had carried off the mould and left exposed a different soil whose color told of disintegrated ore, and of wealth garnered in the breast of the mountains, unknown and uncared for through the ages.

In one place the undergrowth had been pushed aside to make room for a narrow path which wound downward in loops and curves from the high regions, or, in the vernacular—"snaked down ther mounting," to a big live-oak by the river-side where Danvers kept his old flat-bottomed canoe tied in readiness for the times when he "took er noshun" to go fishing. The pool, which

was almost a lake, was famous for perch, bream, and a superb species of mountain trout, said to be of wondrous flavor, and, during the season, sportsmen would come from as far away as Huntsville to angle in its waters. The original spawn had been brought from further north at great trouble and expense, and the lake stocked therewith by the grandfather of Clive Winthrope, who had owned much of the country round about, and had been a devotee of the "gentle sport."

Of the abundance of both bream and trout, and their excellence as pan-fish, such ravishing accounts were in circulation that Dr. Ravenel's sporting instincts kindled. He was an enthusiast with gun and rod, and although his practice was increasing, would contrive to break away now and then and vary the monotony of mitigating pain by the excitement of inflicting it.

One ideal fishing afternoon, with a sky like wet blotting-paper and the wind in the proper quarter, Dr. Ravenel packed up his traps and hied him up to the lake, intent on enjoyment and a heavy basket. It was early for trout, but that made little difference, for dwellers in favored regions where trout abound, will cast a fly at any time from April to November.

The trees, in the lightest of spring clothing, looked forlorn and shivery, like calico in mid-winter, save the pines and balsams in their heavy *dark green* coats on which the changing of the

seasons was, to all appearance, powerless of impression. The ground was damp, for there had been showers the night before, and the mold and decaying leaves gave out a peculiar, pungent odor. Dr. Ravenel stepped along briskly; his slender, well-knit form looked picturesque in his rough gray fishing suit, and his intelligent face almost handsome under the peak of his shabby blue cap. It was so silent in the woods that the fall of a pine-cone sounded preternaturally distinct, and the bark of a squirrel, in a tree close by, fairly cleft the air. Ravenel paused, pushed back his cap, and peered up into the branches. Soon he discovered the little fellow sitting comfortably, beside a hole, on the limb of a big black oak, with his tail over his back and an acorn in his paws.

The young man brought his rod to his shoulder and took aim along it and made as though he would shoot the squirrel to atoms. But "bunny" was wise in his generation and had had his eye-teeth through for many seasons, so he sat quite still on his limb and finished his acorn at leisure, and threw down the empty shell with quite a contemptuous flip of his paw, and stroked his whiskers and turned his bright bead of an eye on Ravenel, as one who would say—"Oh, ho! my fine fellow, you fancy you're scaring me to death; but you're only looking foolish. You're mightily mistaken if you think that I don't know *that* stick has got *no shoot* inside it." Then he rubbed

his nose with his paw, like the gamin he was, and popped into his hole, doubtless to caricature Ravenel for the diversion of his family.

As he resumed his upward way, the young man became conscious of another sound, which, to his trained senses, spoke of things foreign to woodcraft. He bent his head and listened, then laid down his rod and parted the bushes with his hand.

Below him the ground shelved away into a sort of cove, or circular dip, peculiar to limestone regions. It was almost free of undergrowth and carpeted with moss; trees stood thick around it and the shadows fell heavily. In the center a mighty pine lifted itself skyward, and at its foot Ravenel could dimly discern a small, dark heap which at first he took for a crouching animal. It was motionless and the low moaning which had attracted his attention had ceased. He let himself down by the bushes, his sportsman's instinct making him careful to avoid all noise. As he drew nearer the dark heap moved and two arms were thrown upward, with the hands wrung together, and then let fall with a gesture of such desolation that he involuntarily drew back and bared his head with the feeling that he was in the presence of a grief not meant for human eyes. He could see now that it was a woman, huddled together, with her head bent forward on her *knees*. The way the shadows fell prevented him

from recognizing her at first ; but as he noiselessly advanced a step or two he could see that it was Jean.

A wave of pity broke over him—she looked so unutterably forlorn. It was a strange thing for a woman to make her “place of tears” in the lonely forest, in the bosom of nature ; and yet he could understand it : the instinct which had led her straight to the truth and steadfastness of the great mother, the feeling that had made her turn from the inadequacy of humanity to the loneliness and silence which might overpower her woe, if it should fail to comfort it. He could understand—and yet, it seemed a strange thing for a woman to do.

He stood irresolute ; the man’s instinct to aid a woman in distress, the physician’s instinct to utter a warning against the danger of damp and cold, warring with the subtler, nobler instinct which made him feel that should his unauthorized intrusion become known to her, it could only add the baser elements of shame and anger to an emotion it would be powerless to touch. He glanced toward her once more, and then, with his cap still in his hand, he noiselessly withdrew.

Regaining the path, he picked up his rod and thoughtfully pursued his way. He had involuntarily classified Jean as a strong, self-contained woman, sufficient to her own needs, given up to

thought and scornful of emotion. True, he had modified his views somewhat ; the hour they had spent together in his office, her tenderness with the wounded workman, her courage—and, above all, the pallor of her face during the operation, had touched him. All that, to him, seemed womanly. Her after proposal had jarred upon him, and brought back to his mind all the things he had heard of her. He did her full justice in exonerating her from all interest in himself as a *man*. She could not have betrayed less consciousness of his personality had he been the most bloodless scientist that ever bent over a retort. Perhaps the knowledge that this was so was not without influence in his thoughts concerning her. No man with young blood in his veins likes to be regarded abstractly by a woman. It piques and irritates him.

Dr. Ravenel was irritated without the faintest justification for his irritation. He did not approve of Jean ; he was fain to consider her an exaggerated specimen of a type of woman he had always disliked—and yet he could not rid his mind of her. She interested him in spite of himself, and the more decidedly he put her out of his thoughts, the more her image rose and haunted them. Nay, even when his mind would be filled with quite another sort of woman, a woman who, to him, appeared “pure womanly,” there would *still hover, in, the outlying districts of his con-*

sciousness, a faint gray shadow, that was a suggestion of the influence of Jean Monteith.

The picture of her crouched, crying, in that lonely spot, would not leave him. He called himself a brute for leaving her so, and had half a mind to go back. The canoe had been fastened to the live-oak by a long, pliant grape-vine. Ravenel had unloosed it and stood with the end of the grape-vine in his hand, deliberating the point—should he go back? The question was settled for him.

“Ef you-uns air aiming ter borry my boat, doctor, yer air welcome,” drawled a voice somewhere near him. “She ain’t much ter view; but she knows ther ways o’ fish in these here waters. You-uns kin swim, I reckon, so you won’t git drowned, ef you git ambishus an’ load her up too heavy with ther fish.”

Ravenel looked around. No one was in sight; but a rustling attracted his attention to a half-fallen tree, whose branches almost rested in the water. It was covered with young leaves, for, although the tree had been washed from its upright position by high water, most of its roots were still imbedded in the soil. Among the branches, out over the water, Ravenel discovered an old slouch hat and a pair of dangling booted legs.

“Hold on er minute, doctor! I’ll go along of you-un an’ *paddle*, ef so be yer air agreeable.”

Ravenel signified his willingness, and the booted legs were drawn up, the hat rose above the branches, and Danvers made his way along the inclined trunk to the shore. In one hand he held a short rod of primitive construction, and in the other a long string of fish.

"Did you catch all those fish with *that* thing?" demanded the doctor, after greetings had been exchanged, taking the bunch of trout in his hand to test their weight, and surveying his companion's fishing-tackle with disrespect.

Danvers smiled, a queer one-sided smile, and rolled his quid over in his cheek. "They air all good fish, I reckon," he remarked, holding the canoe against the bank for Ravenel to step in. "Yes, I ketched 'em with this here pole. I ain't been more'n an' hour n'other. What made you-un fetch sich er little basket, doctor? With thet thar pole o' you-rns thar'll be er wagon wanted."

The doctor laughed. "All right," he said, "I'll build a fire and camp by the pile while you step down to Melrose and fetch one."

They paddled and poled here and there, fishing in likely places, the hickory sapling, with its yards of twine and home-made float and sinker, holding its own with the doctor's fancy tackle. When the shadows had lengthened so that they almost met across the water, and it was time to think of home and supper, Ravenel reeled up his line and unscrewed his rod and packed it. With Danvers

the preparations for return were more simple; *he* wrapped his line two or three times round the sapling, stuck the hook in the cork and dropped it into the bottom of the boat.

Ravenel lit a cigar, handed one to his companion, who pocketed it for future enjoyment, and waxed conversational. Danvers responded to his advances readily. He liked talking, and he rather liked the doctor, or thought he would, perhaps, after awhile, when Ravenel should learn to speak more slowly and stop being in a hurry. He threw his quid into the water, where it sank and sent up discolored bubbles, and helped himself to a fresh one. The talk, at first, was of sporting matters, and Ravenel scored a point in the mountaineer's favor by displaying sound knowledge of wood-lore. After a little the conversation widened out and took in the people thereabouts, their ways and modes of living. Ravenel asked questions and the mountaineer answered with the shrewd good sense and sly humor of his class. Soon the name of "Monteith" cropped up. The doctor had been well liked by his poorer neighbors.

"It will be a long time before the people get used to doing without him, I'm afraid," observed Ravenel. "I hear his praises everywhere. He must have been a good man."

Danvers sat in the stern of the boat with the paddle *in his hand*. He made a long stroke or

two, which sent the canoe dancing over the water, before he answered.

"He *war* er good man. An' er right down good fren' ter we-uns. Rich an' poor war all alike ter *him*, ef so be they war ailin'. Ther *sickest* one, not ther one best able ter pay, come fust on his list allus. Thar's er many in ther deestric' whar could er been spar'd er sight better'n ther doctor; but he's lyin' under sod, an' they're blithe ez crickets. Ther folks whar hev got religion 'low ter me 'tis allus so, thet ther likeliest o' ther crap air guthered fust, bekase God hankers arter ther good corn fur his own store-house. I dunno. I hevn't no religion myself. I never felt no call to get none. It looks ter me sort o' graspin' in ther A'mighty to be in er hurry to bresh ther good grain into his crib an' leave ther world ther sorry. That thar's the way thet we-uns work, 'tain't no *big* way n'other. Ther folks whar boss God's jobs for him, and claim to know his mind hev 'lowed ter me thet ef 'twarn't his way 'twouldn't be our'n. Thet don't fit good to my noshun. A man gits galled with pullin' in sech harness: it rubs his hide an' makes him want to kick over the traces. I 'lows to myself times——" the man paused reflectively.

"Well?"

There was a note of interrogation in Ravenel's voice.

"*The doctor* were main imprudent. He warn't

a man to spar hisself. He'd ride all day in wet an' cold, an' set up all night without no vittels. Ef folks didn't take keer o' him in ther matter o'er bite an' sup he'd never think o' takin' keer o' hisself. Looks to *me* like ther doctor rid na'tur too hard an' she sort o' hiested him over her head at last. She'll lay any man on his back thet overrides her. Ther doctor warn't much over fifty. He ought ter hev lasted twenty ye'r longer en what he did. Ef he'd greased his works with er little mo' thought for his own comfort, maybe he would er been here yet."

The shadows deepened, brooding over the water: the circles made by the dipping of the paddle widened and intersected and formed a net-work of which the boat was the nucleus: the branches of the trees waved to and fro: frogs intoned their vesper service among the sedges.

"How long is it since his wife died?"

"Lemme see!" reflectively. "Our Bill war born ther ye'r thet Ruben Jacobs an' Obediah Phelps had thar fallin' out, an' Rube hit 'Diah in ther head with er hand-spike, along o' ther heat o' argymint. 'Diah, he went crazy from ther 'fects o' ther blow; an' Rube, he war took up an' jailed fur ten ye'rs fur 'sault with intent to kill. It war an' onjustice too, fur every man upon ther mounting know'd thet 'Diah hit ther fust lick by callin' of Rube er 'damned liar'. When a word like that is named to *er man* an' he don't hit out fur answer,

he be er sorry sort o' chap an' mos' too mean fur shootin'. Ef it's er lie he ought'r take it up bekase t'is er lie; an' ef it's ther truth he ought'r take it up bekase er sorry character needs all ther help it kin git frum muscle. Anyhow, Rube done it, an' war jailed, though some folks 'lowed 'twarn't ther hand-spike whar crazed 'Diah; that he natur'ly didn't hev sense enuf to keep hissef sane nohow. Well, Bill war born 'bout thet time, an' ther ole 'ooman 'lowed ter me this mornin' thet Rube's sentence would be out in ther spring. Thet makes Bill ten ye'r old, an' Mrs. Monteith, she died afore Bill war born. Yes: thet's so—it's risin' ten ye'r since ther doctor lost his wife."

"What sort of woman was she?"

Ravenel thought that if he could form some definite idea of Jean's parents, it would aid him to comprehension of the girl herself. That she was the product of an unusual combination of forces, he already half suspected.

Danvers pushed back his hat, and rubbed his unkempt head, probably to aid memory by friction.

"I dunno," he said presently, "I can't rightly say I knowed her. She war an' ailin', complainified creeter, allus flat on her back with somethin'—'ralgia, or nerves, or some such truck. When we-uns would ax ther doctor how his wife was, he'd allus say 'about as usual.' I seed her once *or twice*—oh, more'n thet I reckon! I worked

fur ther doctor once er spell when Miss Jean war er little 'un. Fust time I ever seed Mrs. Monteith she come out to ther stable, whar I war at work, shingling it new. She had fixed up er basket o' jelly an' light-bread an' cakes an' such-like, fur my wife, who were poorly an' ther doctor tendin' on her. Ther lady war pleasant spoken. She 'lowed ter me thet she'd been sick so much herself thet she could understand 'bout sick folks' fancies, an' thet sometimes er biscuit from er naybor's kitchen tasted better'n any thing er-body could make tharselves. She war er good woman, I reckon. I never hearn nothin' 'gainst her excusin' she war mighty sickly."

"Did she belong to Melrose?"

"No; ther doctor fetched her frum furren parts—up North, or across ther water. *He* war Melrose born an' bred; but he went away to git an eddication. He war gone a right smart while, an' then his uncle, Sandy Monteith, what raised him, died an' left him some prop'ty, an' ther doctor come back home to live an' fetched a wife with him. Thar was a boy baby too; but it died. Miss Jean come arterwards—just befo' ther war broke out."

"Is Miss Monteith like her mother?" Ravenel inquired.

"Lord love you, no! No more'n I am—barrin' bein' er woman, an' me er man. Miss Jean's ther very *moral* o' ther doctor, face, an' ways, an'

natu'r—'cept she's so mortal little, an' ther doctor war er full grow'd man. Mrs. Monteith war er likely woman—tall an' straight ez er poplar. Her voice war dif'ent frum we-uns—had more *aidge* to it. She'd er been er mighty likely woman ef her face hadn't looked like 'twar molded out'n tallow, an' her eyes had been like t'other folks."

The doctor looked up. "What was the matter with her eyes?" he queried.

Danvers considered a moment. "Did yer ever burn hemp an' terbacker under a distempered dog's nose?" he questioned in his turn. "Ef yer never did, do it, an' watch his eyes. Ther lights in 'em flar up, an' gather to er p'int an' then die down—sort er slow, like er burned out fire with ther ashes creepin' over it. Mrs. Monteith's eyes looked like thet, only ther ashes war pretty thick an' ther p'int war dim."

A suggestion, an association of ideas, half formulated a thought in the doctor's brain, which perished ere it attained development.

The boat touched the bank and he leaped out, all lesser matters merged in care for his precious rod and the scarcely less precious trophies of success. It is a fine thing to tell a good fish story; but it is a far, far finer thing to be in a position to substantiate it *with the fish*.

All the shadows had joined issue: a breeze came down the mountain and roughened anew *the stilling surface* of the water. In the west the

crimson slowly faded into gray. Away in the woods a pheasant drummed to his mate; wild turkeys called to one another as they sought the roosting-place.

Ravenel stepped briskly homeward, thinking a great deal of his sport, and a little of Maud Tinsley. How fair she was; how soft and gracious! There were no incomprehensible turns in Maud's nature, no surprises sprung upon a man, no upheavals of accustomed things. All was orderly, smooth, conventional—easy to understand, easy to regulate. Or so the young man thought, wanting the wisdom yet which teaches that not many inches below well-ordered sod may lay hard granite. He pictured Maud as a sunny meadow with daisies and dew-drops and lambkins, and the rest of it, all within a neat ring-fence, with an orderly gate of which a man might keep the key in his vest pocket. And he thought, as other men have done, that such surroundings would be more conducive to happiness, than would the mystery of valleys, or even the grandeur of mountains.

As he neared the Monteiths' gate, he paused, a sudden thought of Jean dashing through his well-ordered visions like a swift-winged bird. He wondered if she were safe at home, and felt a strong desire to inform himself. He would call and leave some trout and put a question to the servant. He would feel better satisfied with

himself, more at ease about her. Then for the first time it struck him how lonely her life must be.

The shutters were unclosed and the light from the study window fell in a broad sheet across the porch and on to the ground outside. The steps were at either end of the porch, and to reach the front door it would be necessary for Ravenel to pass in front of the window, or else go round to the further end. Without any thought in the matter he stepped up on the porch by the nearer way. The night had closed in, and the room was strongly lighted; opposite the window Ravenel involuntarily paused and glanced in, started, and then drew nearer.

On a table, just in his line of vision, stood two lamps, their light so adjusted as to focus the rays on a small, dark object fastened down to a board. The thing, whatever it might be, was alive; he could see it move and quiver; could almost see the dilatation of the terrified eyes, the pulsations of the terrified heart. Ravenel's brows contracted; with every detail of similar scenes he was familiar. He knew what Jean was getting out of the cabinet in the recess, although her back was toward him, knew that her hand sought, amid drugs, for chloroform or ether, and that in a moment the light would flash on slender knives and cruel-looking hooks and pincers.

Jean advanced and bent over the table. He

could see her face distinctly ; it was pale and her hand shook as she poured ether on the sponge. Without a thought of justification Ravenel leaned on the window frame and gazed in : Would she do it ? He almost sickened. He had done it a score of times himself ; but somehow *this* was different—was horrible to him. Jean laid the sponge on the creature's head and pressed it down ; the thing shivered and struggled : he could see that she trembled and that her face turned ghastly. The instruments were ready to her hand and she reached over and took up one : it was slender and keen-edged : the polished surface glittered in the lamplight. Jean pressed it against the hand that held the sponge—it drew blood.

A surge of indignation swept through Ravenel and he laid his hand on the window, determined to interfere at all hazards. For a moment he hated Jean, and, in his heart, called her cruel and unwomanly.

Suddenly she uttered a low cry and threw sponge and scalpel to the floor. Her hands shook so that she could scarcely unfasten the cords that bound the animal down. Its great eyes shone and it was limp and motionless: she raised it to her face, bent her ear to its side, anxiety, terror, remorse swept over her face in waves, giving place at last to the stillness of infinite relief. It was not dead. Barely a second had elapsed since she had applied the ether and she had not held the sponge properly

the creature still breathed and Jean busied herself to aid nature to resume its functions.

Ravenel drew back into the shadow, conscious, through revulsion of feeling, of how much he had dreaded to see her persist in the experiment. He almost held his breath as Jean came to the window, raised it, and passed along the porch and down the steps into the yard. She had the creature in her arms and was sobbing—low, dry sobs, that went to his heart. He thought that she was frightened at the thing she had been near doing. She was not. She was filled with rage at her own womanhood.

A second time she had made an effort for the knowledge that she needed, and a second time she had failed.

CHAPTER IX.

“YES,” said Miss Parma Wright, holding her needle a long way off and poking at it seriously with the thread. “I consider them as good as engaged. Mrs. Tinsley may say what she chooses about Maud’s being only a child. That’s foolishness. Maud’s nineteen years old, and as well grown a girl as ever I saw.”

Miss Elsworth looked attentive. Her mind was almost as full as it could hold with anxiety as to the best method of altering her dark green cashmere, and as the gown had already undergone three transformations, with but little addition of new material, the subject was one that taxed her powers. Still, a woman’s interest in love affairs is perennial, and when one is under discussion even the alteration of a gown will be pushed into the background.

“Dear me! You don’t say so!” she exclaimed, “why Mrs. Tinsley told me—no, stay! she only *hinted*; but she did it so broadly that a driveling idiot could have understood her, that that rich young fellow from Huntsville, the man that owns the oil-mill, was getting particular in his

attentions to Maud. He is up here right often, and I know that he goes to the Tinsleys' every time he comes."

"Pshaw! That don't amount to a row of pins," replied Miss Parma. "The man is courting her of course, that's as plain as the nose on your face; but courtship is a long way off from marriage. Maud's pretty enough to turn any man's head, and the oil man's is a light one. Mrs. Tinsley is working her fingers to the bone to make the match, on account of the money. It may be reprehensible in a preacher's wife—I dare say it is, the Bible says so much about the blessedness of poverty; but it's natural in a mother. I don't blame her in the least."

Neither did Miss Elsworth. Poverty that brought the ever recurring problem of how to make "auld cla'es amaist as gude as new," was a thing to be shunned, a devil to be put and kept behind one by all lawful means. Still, she loved romance with a Southern woman's love, and on one of the tired fingers of her worn left hand was a ring which, people said, had a pitiful history connected with it. Money is a good thing; but, even to a woman with her youth behind her and the wearing struggle of inadequate means constantly in front, there is recognition that life can hold far better things than money.

"You think Maud will marry him."

"Will a duck swim?" demanded Miss Parma.

"Of course she's going to marry him. Didn't I just say they were as good as engaged? She'd marry him in the cracking of a whip."

"He's a—little wild, they say," ventured Miss Elsworth. She was an old-fashioned woman and shrank from so strong a word as "dissipated."

"Who? Dr. Ravenel? You're distracted, Maria Elsworth! He's nothing of the sort. There isn't a steadier young man in the country than Theodore Ravenel. You forget that he is a connection of mine. His step-uncle married my own blessed second cousin."

Miss Parma looked and spoke as indignantly as though the honor of her house had been maliciously impugned. She had insisted on the connection so strenuously to Dr. Ravenel as to preclude all possibility of his ever expecting reimbursement for professional services. She would pay him in her own way, however; having assumed the position of a mercenary she would fight for her chief.

Her friend offered explanation and apology.

"We are talking at cross-purposes," she said. "I was thinking of the oil man, and I thought you were, too. Of course Dr. Ravenel is perfectly correct. He don't go to church, it is true; but then, neither did Dr. Monteith. I suppose it's the way with doctors. They're so busy, and, ten to one, if they should come they'd be dragged out to look at somebody's tongue in the very max-

row of the sermon. And so it's Dr. Ravenel Maud's going to marry? Dear! dear! her mother won't like that! Margaret is"—hesitating for a word not too accusative—"a bit 'cumbered with serving.' The things of this world weigh on her. She has set her heart on Maud's making a brilliant match."

"Then she'll have to unset it," retorted Miss Parma briskly. "That's the portion of mothers. When a girl's in love she's thinking of the man, not the mother, and if Maud isn't in love with Dr. Ravenel, I never saw a girl in love with a man yet. He's with her constantly, and looks as though *he* was in earnest, too. It will be a judgment on Margaret for interfering so much with other people."

Miss Parma was fond of meting out judgment, and prone to invest the executive with her own personality, to take it as a foregone conclusion that the higher powers were existent for the purpose of taking up individual grudges. She was very much irritated with Mrs. Tinsley, and that something unpleasant should befall her, seemed but the proper sequence. For years Miss Parma, had felt herself fitted to adorn Clive Winthrop's house, and to be a comfort to him. She had worked on, with dismal lack of success, but abundant store of hope, and had counted on the minister's wife as an efficient ally. The understanding *had been tacit*; but Miss Parma had felt that in

this matter she could depend upon her friend to back her up, as it were. And latterly her friend had not only deserted from her standard, but had exhibited an unprincipled willingness to erect another standard in its stead; for, with her own two ears, and they were keen ones, Miss Parma had heard the minister's wife joke—yes, actually joke—Mr. Winthrop about that pale-faced girl, Jean Monteith. Nor was this the worst, for there was a report in circulation, clearly traceable to Mrs. Tinsley, to the effect that as soon as the year of mourning should expire, the big brown house would receive a mistress. That Mrs. Tinsley would help on the match by every means in her power, was beyond a doubt, and it betokened such moral obliquity on her part that it is not wonderful that Miss Parma should be able to discern the hand of Providence in any evil which might be in store for the Tinsleys.

As for Jean, Miss Parma disliked her with energy and singleness of purpose. Her interest in humanity was of the kind which is intolerant of reservations. She loved to set open the cupboard doors, to pry into the attics and the cellars and the hidden places of people's lives. Indeed, to Miss Parma's thinking, there should be no hidden places. All things should be done under the eyes of man—or, to speak more accurately, of woman—so that each act might be put on trial

with due rigor and publicity. That there had been, for years, in the Monteiths' home, a chamber whose threshold was crossed by no foot save those of the household, she was aware, and many tales, circulated principally by negroes, had she hearkened to. To know that there was something near her which people objected to having talked about, and to be debarred from acquainting herself with every detail concerning it, was torture to Miss Parma.

Once her craving for accurate information had nearly been satisfied. She had been spending "a long day" with Jean in social country fashion, and had made her way up-stairs, guided by a sound with which every one who visited the doctor's house was more or less familiar; her hand had been on the knob, when the door had opened and Jean had come out, quietly taken her by the arm and led her down to the parlor, talking courteously the while; but with a look on her face which had made Miss Parma feel, to say the least, uncomfortable.

There were other things too; Jean's refusal of her companionship, after the doctor's death—an arrangement which would have suited Miss Parma's plans and pocket, for Clive Winthrop continued his visits to the lonely house, and Jean would have been able to give some salary to a *duenna* if she would have consented to take one.

Without any fault of Jean's, therefore, many things combined to make her a nucleus around which gathered unpleasant images in Miss Parma's mind.

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CHAPTER X.

JEAN sat in her father's chair with her head down on her folded arms. On the table lay piles of manuscript, books of reference, and the usual paraphernalia of literary work. The classification of the material from which was to be evolved the important second volume had been completed, and the form of it was crystallizing in her mind. She had studied the first volume and penetrated to the very marrow of her father's method. The principles on which he had worked had only to be consistently carried out and an harmonious whole would be the result.

During the half-year which had elapsed since the doctor's death, Jean had read and thought and studied. She had worked hard and surmounted many difficulties; but there were others still in her path which she was fain to confess well-nigh daunted her. She had done much alone, but recognition was being forced upon her that she *must* have help ere she could hope to do more. Her knowledge was theoretical, she could not even be sure that it was accurate; that her *deductions* would stand the test of experience;

of examination by deeper knowledge. There was nothing by which she could measure herself; the reflex of her womanhood made her self-distrustful; unconsciously she yearned for the crucible of a man's mind in which to test the value and truth of that which she had acquired.

What should she do? The dry bones were before her; some skill she possessed for the erection of the framework, she could even clothe it with flesh after a fashion. But how, handicapped as she was by want of experience and unverified knowledge, could she be sure that the organism over which she had labored would ever receive the vital principle—that the thing would be so constructed that it would *live*. It was just here that her mind misgave her, that her courage well-nigh failed, that she obtained an unobstructed view of the largeness of her undertaking. Suppose, after all, the world should receive an abortion labeled with her father's name.

She dashed the thought from her mind with anger. Viewed in the light of things she knew, there was a suggested prophecy in it that appalled her. Poor father! such a cruel thing should never be duplicated, *never*. Her love reached out to infold the dead man's memory, and her hold on her promise renewed itself. She would *not* fail him. The work *should* succeed. She would let nothing stand in the way of her purpose: she would obtain the needed help at any cost.

But how? To leave home, to go to the North to the colleges, which would be the simple, natural and legitimate mode of procedure, would be, for her, impossible. She was bound by that other promise which in her eyes was no less sacred—the promise to keep the home together as long as there should be need; to be faithful to the deeper responsibility which, at her father's death, had devolved upon *her*. She could not go away, and the influences of her environment were against her starting out as a physician on her own account and seeking to gain the experience she required at the expense of her neighbors. Indeed this way out of her dilemma did not occur to Jean. She did not want to practice medicine, she wanted to finish her father's work in such a manner as would reflect honor on the name of Monteith.

Her thoughts kept circling around Dr. Ravenel. He had, perhaps, that which she needed: he was here, easily accessible, he might help her if he would. Should she take him into her confidence? Jean's pride rose. She had gone to him once in all faith, and she had been refused. His reasons for the refusal had only been half recognized, even at the time; but the expression of his face, a tone in his voice, had made her uncomfortable, had brought the blood to her cheeks. She had felt that he disapproved of her, but had not quite known wherefore.

Poor little Jean! Her up-bringing had been so

primitive, her life so held apart from that of other people : her standards were so simple, and her lack of self-consciousness so absolute that the fact that people might, and would, talk about her, never entered her mind at all. She was too completely absorbed by her one idea to take into account the light in which her actions might be viewed by that portion of the world represented by the inhabitants of Melrose.

No : she would not confide in Dr. Ravenel. Indeed, to confide in any one was no part of her plan. What then should she do?

Jean pushed the papers aside and rose. The night was close and warm, and she went to the window. Her heavy gown almost stifled her and she stepped out on the porch and wandered down towards the gate. The moon hung high, with a bank of white clouds below, fleecy and crested, like foam. The hills were black with the density of foliage : in the distance the lights of the village twinkled. Jean leaned against the trunk of a giant sycamore near the gate ; the blackness of her gown blended with the shadow and made her invisible from the roadway. The doctor's big gray horse, grazing in a field close by, lifted his head and whinnied.

Thoughts crowded upon Jean, suggestions that caused her to shiver as though a cold wind stirred the night. A sentence, let fall by her father in a moment of abstraction, came back and haunted

her. Forces that ante-dated her birth were at work ; in her brain new lines of transit were being opened.

Away up the mountain-side she could hear the sound of a horse's hoof. It was Dr. Ravenel ; she had seen him pass earlier in the evening and knew that one of Danvers's children was ill, and that the doctor was anxious about the case. The road was rough and there was no need of haste on the return ; the rider had drawn rein and was advancing at a walk. The road stretched away plainly visible in the moonlight : the shadow of horse and man, exaggerated and distorted, flitted, a goblin shape, beside them ; the air was motionless and the only sound was that of the horse's foot-fall.

Jean drew back where the gloom was deepest, and, moved by an impulse she did not understand or pause to analyze, began to sing. Soft and sweet as an organ's breathing, at first, then gaining strength and volume, her voice rose and swelled until it seemed to fill all the space that lies on the hither side of silence. The song she sang was a wild Thuringian legend which had been set to music as wild ; and the tale it told was of a knight who followed the chase into the recesses of the forest, and of how, separated from his companions and overtaken by storm and darkness, he had found shelter in a deserted tower that over-hung "a silent pool where dead men slept." And of how in the night he was roused from slumber by strains of weird, alluring melody, and the

touch of hands, and the pressure of lips that clung to his own and drew away his breath. And with his struggles the music rose and fell, until at last it sank to a monotone that was the death song.

The listener sat like a statue—motionless, well-nigh breathless. He had reined in his horse, as the first note fell on the air, and then had removed his hat with the instinctive respect men pay to music when their love for it is tintured with reverence. The moonlight fell on him and illumined the slender, upright figure, the uncovered head, the earnest face, the eyes, that did not seek to penetrate the mystery, but gazed forward into space.

The horse stirred once or twice and lifted up his foot, but put it down again softly, as though he too was spellbound.

CHAPTER XI.

“**A** RTHUR!” exclaimed Mrs. Tinsley, glancing up from the sock she was darning, “I’m troubled about Jean Monteith; dreadfully troubled about her. She’s leading the sort of life that no girl should lead, shut up in that Moated Grange of a house, without a soul to speak to except her mammy from one day’s end to another; her face stuck between the pages of a book, never going anywhere, never seeing any body. It’s enough to dry up all the youth in her. It isn’t natural, and it isn’t right.”

The minister reached over to the table for his pipe; he always filled his pipe when his wife wanted to talk to him: it took the sharp edge off of disagreement, and sometimes obviated the necessity of reply. A long-drawn whiff of smoke can be made to fill a pause very effectively when delivered by a man of experience.

“There’s Parma Wright,” proceeded Mrs. Tinsley, “every time Jean’s name is mentioned she rolls up her eyes and draws down her lips, and looks as if she could unwind a story as long as *this* ball of yarn. Of course she only knows what

all the world knows, because there's nothing else *to* know; but she tries to produce the impression of 'treason, stratagem and spoils,' and herself the discoverer of the deadly plot. I've no patience with Parma! The other day at Maria Elsworth's she was as rude as rude can be to me for nothing at all. I simply remarked that no one need disturb themselves about Jean's loneliness any longer, for all the signs pointed to that matter rectifying itself in a most natural and romantic manner, and Parma turned on me like a rattle-snake and quite hissed out that *some* people considered themselves the heaven-appointed directors of their neighbors' affairs and were never so happy as when intermeddling; but that in *some* instances the event would prove that they had been arguing from mistaken premises from the first. Parma always gets verbose when she is excited, though what there could be in my remark to excite her I can't see. If she were an ugly, angular woman people would call her spiteful; but as she happens to be plump and handsome they say 'it's a pity she should be so sarcastic.' Her ferocious assault on *me* was most unjust and uncalled for. If there is one thing I *can* lay claim to, it is tolerance and forbearance with my neighbors. It's very rarely that I interfere with any one's affairs, even when the chances are that I should better them by so doing."

Mrs. Tinsley snapped off a new needleful of

yarn, and filled in a little hole and a big one with praiseworthy diligence. The smoke from her husband's pipe rose and floated above her, like the smoke of incense burned on the altar of self-appreciation. The shutters were closed and the room was cool and shaded; outside jar-flies chanted a *gloria* to the sun-god, and the atmosphere quivered and glistened with the heat haze. In a room across the hall Maud was practicing, the sound of her voice came to them, and the words of the song she was singing:—

“ There was a lass, and she was fair,
At kirk and market to be seen,
When a' the fairest maids were met,
The fairest maid was bonnie Jean.”

“ Why can't they let her alone? ” demanded the minister; “ the child goes her own way and harms nobody. Why can't they let her alone? ”

“ Because they won't! ” asserted his wife positively; “ because we live in an exceedingly dull place where the least breath of any thing unusual is a God-send; and it is most unusual for a girl to live in the way Jean is living. People will talk as long as they have tongues and as long as other people give them the opportunity by being different.”

“ Would opportunity vanish if similarity could be increased? ” reflectively murmured the minister, *removing his pipe and gazing into the bowl as*

though he fancied it might contain a solution of the problem.

His wife pursued her own train of thought heedless of the interruption.

"Jean is unlike any body I ever saw in my life. In some things she seems almost deficient, although she is so clever. She is in as completely natural a state as though she had been born and raised quite beyond the pale of civilization, and yet she has the best manners of any woman I know. She is never rude, and yet she offends against most of the accepted canons of society. She has no more regard for appearances than a child, and there is no more *intention* of violating them, on her part, than a child would have. I've given up trying to understand her. She's an anomaly: she's like nobody else!"

"She's like her father," suggested Mr. Tinsley. "I never saw a daughter more so. The same loyalty, the same concentration of affection, the same sensitive honor, the same big, simple, true-hearted way of looking at things. Sometimes when I talk to Jean I could fancy it the doctor come to life. Even her voice is his, as far as a womanly voice can be, and her face startles me at times, it is so like. The similarity is more than likeness, it is reproduction. Nature works strangely. I remember years ago meeting with a theory in some book which went to prove that as the intellectual or spiritual elements of a child were

derived from the father, and the material from the mother, in the development of the child the male element increases and the female decreases in ratio proportionate to the perfection of the development. This would explain a *growing* likeness in Jean to the doctor, perhaps, but not the marked similarity now existing. Jean is too young to have attained any thing like the requisite development, and yet—as far as the mother is concerned—she might be *your* child, Margaret, or the child of almost any woman, for any trace I can see in her of Mrs. Monteith.”

Like a wise woman Mrs. Tinsley waited until her husband should free his mind of speculations relative to the operation of physical laws, viewed from either physical or psychical stand-point, before claiming his attention for matters mundane. Her own notions of heredity were founded on observation and common sense.

“You remember, Arthur,” she remarked, “before Jean was born, the doctor and his wife were inseparable. It was before her health became poor and she used even to go his rounds with him. I never saw a wife so engrossed. I really believe she tried to think the doctor’s thoughts and feel his feelings. The doctor used to read with her, walk with her, drive with her, keep her beside him always. He seemed to be afraid to let her out of his sight, I suppose because of the *loss of the little boy*. It isn’t at all wonderful

that Jean should be a pocket edition of the doctor: indeed she could not be any thing else."

"Good!" commended the minister, regarding his wife with surprised approval; "you amaze me. I'd no idea you troubled yourself with these questions. I thought your interest in life was more personal, more external. I beg your pardon. Jean then, according to you, is the result of ante-natal concentration on the part of the mother. The hypothesis is tenable; but I can't for the life of me understand how the woman could do it. As a rule women scatter dreadfully. In a normal condition I don't believe any woman could do it. Could Mrs. Monteith have——?" he paused and steadfastly regarded his wife.

Then he rose, crossed the room to the bookshelves, took down a volume and rapidly turned the pages. Having found the desired paragraph he read it over carefully, returned the book to its place and resumed his seat. His face was grave; but on it rested the satisfied look of a man who has at last run to earth a troublesome problem.

Mrs. Tinsley drew her thread in and out, weaving in plans and projects as she wove the holes together. Her husband's praise had pleased her; but her opinion of her own powers was founded on too firm a rock to be subject to the ebb and flow of momentary elation. Besides, her head was filled with a plan by which she might read-just Jean's *life* for her in spite of that young

woman's disposition to disregard advice, and at the same time avenge herself on Miss Parma Wright for her unkind aspersions.

The minister smoked with an air of contemplation. Maud had progressed to the third verse of her song:—

“But hawks will rob the tender joys,
That bless the little lint-white's nest;
And frost will blight the fairest flow'rs,
And love will break the soundest rest.”

The suggestions of the song formed an opening wedge for the introduction of Mrs. Tinsley's plan. This, divested of all ambiguity of expression, was simply to marry Jean in as short a time as would be admissible to Clive Winthrope, or, at least, to get an engagement contracted and made public in the thousand and one ways in which women contrive to let such things become patent. By using the forces ready to her hand, Mrs. Tinsley had little doubt she would succeed in hunting Jean from her solitude, and the enterprise was one that appealed to her in many ways.

“Mr. Winthrope is just waiting for an opportunity to speak, and there's no reason why he shouldn't speak. I believe it's the atmosphere of that house which has held him back so long. If Jean could be brought out among cheerful people and into *some* bright place he would find his tongue fast *enough*. I think I'll try and help him thaw the

ice from around Jean. I think I'll try and give the poor fellow a chance."

"Unless Winthrope requested your help, Margaret, I think I'd let the matter alone if I were you," observed her husband. "Match-making is playing with fire: somebody is likely to be scorched. Give it a wide berth, my dear, it's a dangerous, thankless business. If a man wants a woman he'll contrive to let her know it without outside assistance."

Mrs. Tinsley nodded her head and smiled to herself. She said no more, but her thoughts were busy. She had no idea of abandoning her intention because it failed to meet with her husband's sanction. Her husband was a good man, and his ideas were good—far too good for everyday use. In matters apart from practical experience, she would yield to his judgment; but in matters within such experience, she rarely failed to convince herself that the part of wisdom was to carry her own measure over his veto.

"Jean in love," mused the minister, "Jean with a lover. It seems incongruous somehow: the idea don't fit into my mind naturally; it's foreign matter. I must get used to it, for I suppose it will come sooner or later. I wonder how she will manage a love affair."

"Pretty much as other girls, I dare say," replied his wife. "Love is a touchstone that brings out *strong similarities* in women. Jean's difference

can't be organic ; she's a woman after all. Perhaps a love affair will make her more human—more like other people."

"It may make her more like other people ; she's human enough already. You misunderstand Jean : you all do. You can't measure a creature like that in the universal pint cup. Her sort go toward filling the spaces of the infinite. Jean's love affair would be interesting if one could get at the inwardness of it. She won't manage it like other girls either. Of that I am convinced."

"How will she manage it?"

"That's a poser. How unkind you are, Margaret ! You force me to my usual refuge—I don't know. Only it will be in a way of her own."

"We shall see."

There was a suspicion of mockery in Mrs. Tinsley's voice. Her husband thought himself so wise, so penetrating. Half impatiently she longed to see him brought to confusion. It would be a relief too for Jean to do something commonplace. Difference suggested superiority, and there was something in her husband's view that chafed her.

She wrote her notes, therefore, the following day—pretty, wily little notes, one to Jean, and one to Winthrop, inviting them both to tea for the purpose of hearing and pronouncing judgment *on a lot of new music* Maud had just had sent her *from Huntsville* ; and to her delight both invita-

tions were accepted. She exhibited Jean's note to her husband with elation.

"Now that the shock of her loss is passing away, that poor child is moped to death," she remarked; "she doesn't know exactly how to help herself, but with instruction and encouragement she may find out. The difference, very possibly, is ignorance after all."

The minister was pleased; he had a strong sympathy for Jean. He determined that the evening she spent with them should be made pleasant, and to that end dropped into Dr. Ravenel's office and invited him to make one of the party.

"My wife has what the Quakers call 'a concern' about little Jean Monteith," he said; "she has undertaken to *sociulize* her. The process promises to be interesting. Come up and take a hand."

And Dr. Ravenel said that he would.

CHAPTER XII.

AS a factor in the life of Melrose, old Jack Johns would have been graded low in public opinion. Had the matter been put to vote, the decision would have been unanimous that, apart from some slight æsthetic value as an occasional adjunct to the landscape, old Jack was of importance to no mortal soul save his rheumatic old wife and the half dozen mongrels who made a kennel of his cabin. As an individual, Jack might be *nil*; but as an atom he was not so unimportant to the aggregate as more highly placed atoms were disposed to think.

For one thing, Jack, when he chose to exert himself, was a first-rate gardener, cunning in soils and the ways of plants and vegetables. Had he been a thrifty man, an excellent living would have been assured to him, for the minister was always ready to give him a job, and so was Mr. Winthrop, while he was as much at home in the Monteiths' garden as he was in the patch behind his *own cabin*.

But Jack loved leisure and the contemplation

of nature through hazes of tobacco smoke, and the social allurements of the Black Bear. It was only when he got too far ahead of his credit, or his cronies grew narrow-minded on the subject of "treats," or the "ole 'ooman" needed comforts, that Jack would arm himself with spade and hoe and betake himself to one or other of the aforementioned gardens.

A season of social prostration which necessitated physical activity, was upon him now, and he stood in the middle of the clerical potato patch with his hat pushed back, and his body inclined to the support of the hoe-helve. His attitude was contemplative, for the sun was hot, the job had been paid for in advance, and there was in him no conscious restlessness. Behind him, the rows looked clean and trim, with the freshly turned soil heaped up against the green plants; before him was a tangle of potato vines, weeds and wild convolvulus covered with half-shriveled white and purple bells.

Mrs. Tinsley was in the garden also, caring for some tender plants she had re-potted the evening before. Having given them the needful supply of water, she looked about for something to shade them with, and finally called Jack to come and cut her some branches from a straggling old syringa bush.

"The fresh earth hasn't settled to the roots yet," she said, "and I don't want the sun to scorch them. I lost several valuable cuttings last sum-

mer by trusting to Maud to shade them. She forgot all about it and the sun fairly cooked them."

Jack threw his weight sideways on to one leg, straightened the other and dived down into a non-descript aperture in his fragmentary trowsers from which he brought forth a horn-handle knife. Jack had, to use his own phrase, "ez good clo'se in his chis' ez any man," but during his occasional fits of diligence, he preferred to apparel himself in rags, perhaps he had discovered that the more forlorn he made himself appear, the more certain was he of payment in advance.

"Thar ain't no dependableness in young creeter's," he remarked sententiously, drawing down a branch of syringa and cutting it. "Thar heads air fuller o' foolishness then er cymblin' go'de o' seeds, an' thar ways aint no steadier 'en er squir'l, hoppin' here, an' hoppin' thar, thinkin' 'bout nothin' frum sunrise t'well sundown 'ceptin' tharselves an' ther ones they aim ter mate with."

Mrs. Tinsley smiled.

"At all events you can't complain," she said. "You have no daughters."

"Mebbe ef I had, I wouldn't. Folks ain't apt ter run down goods they've got in stock. Not but what ther ole 'ooman an' me hev allus got new ground to clean up an' fence in jes' puttin' up 'long o' one n'other. When er man hev got er 'ooman, an' er 'ooman a man to tend to, thar's *plenty fur all hands to do, ef they whirl in an'*

take holt right, whether thar's gals an' boys besides or no. Chil'un are a sight o' help sometimes, an' then agin they're er sight o' hindrance. Ef you ain't got none, er good dog'll fill ther gap, an' even er sorry one'll help kornsiderble. I telled Squire Winthrope thet yestiddy when I was grubbin' o' his garden; an', bein' ez *his* air a lonesome house I offered him a pup or two to take ther aidge off'n thar emptinesss."

"Did he take them?"

Mrs. Tinsley moved two pots together so that the same branch could shelter them.

"No'm. He 'lowed he'd study about it an' lemme know arter he got back. Ef he couldn't do no better, he sed, mebbe he'd take ther pups."

"Got back?" repeated the lady with interest. "Where has he gone? When did he go? I saw him day before yesterday—he took tea with us: he didn't say any thing about going anywhere then. It must have been sudden."

"T'war suddint. Er tallygram come fur him to Winston night afore last, an' 'twar sont over horse-back fust thing yestiddy mornin'. 'Twar frum some kinfolks up Virginny way an' 'tw'er 'bout a will an' prop'ty an' some chil'un. Squire got on his horse an' rid over to Winston at once, an' then sent back arter his razors, so I reckon he kep' on to Virginny."

"Do you know when he will be back?" demanded Mrs. Tinsley, turning over the bit of news

in her mind and feeling a trifle outraged that she should have been allowed to hear of it in this haphazard way after all the interest she had taken in Clive Winthrope's affairs.

"He war in such a swivet he forgot to menshun," observed Jack with a twinkle in his eye. "I seed Miss Parma Wright overtake him at the bend o' ther road; she war gwine fur an' airin' on thet piebald nag o' her'n an' his way an' her'n war the same. Mebbe she kin tell you all about it."

"Did he go to see *any body* before he left—to the Monteiths' for instance?" In her interest Mrs. Tinsley forgot that she might be laying bare her plan to the shrewd eyes of the man beside her.

"Miss Jean?" he queried with disconcerting straightforwardness. "I dunno. Didn't make no diff'ence nohow. Miss Jean knows gwine or comin' it's all one ez far ez she air kornsarned. Ef he war ez far away ez Ingy, or even Texas, she could whistle him home in no time. She hev got ther same sort o' sense whar t'other 'ooman-folks has—ef she *hev* got er sight beyant it."

Mrs. Tinsley finished sheltering her plants. Her face was flushed from stooping and she took off her sun-bonnet and moved into the shadow of a tall box-wood. It was midday, and the air was so still and transparent that the vertical rays of the sun seemed powerful enough to generate *combustion*. The box-trees, trimmed into cones,

stood like towers at the intersections of the walks, and the stiff green borders of box formed connecting ramparts. Over the garden was a slumberous calm that accorded with its old-world look.

After a moment Mrs. Tinsley put a question that had been trembling on her lips for several moments.

“Has Mr. Martyn been up to the mill recently?”

Her tone was elaborately unconcerned. Mr. Martyn was the wealthy young man from Huntsville who owned the oil-mill. He was reputed a millionaire—an unprecedented thing for the South, and he had been attentive to Maud. The mother had set her heart on the match; but with an uneasy feeling that the daughter might have set hers elsewhere. She made pictures of the future set in frames of gold, and kept them constantly on exhibition in her own mind. The young fellow had been as devoted as maternal heart could wish, until very lately; but now three weeks had passed without his presenting himself at the parsonage. Mrs. Tinsley knew that he had not been disposed of in the legitimate way, for she had questioned Maud. The best thing, of course, would be to have one's daughter marry a million; but if, through natural deficiency, one's daughter should fail to rise to the occasion, the next best thing is to be able

to affirm that she *could* have married a million had she chosen to do so.

One or other of the situations Mrs. Tinsley was resolved to bring to pass, should it be in the power of woman. Millionaires are wary creatures, hard to catch as mocking-birds, be the salt never so well hidden, and the stalking never so cleverly managed.

Jack turned his quid over in his jaw and shoved up his hat from the back. He was as well aware of the train of thought passing through the lady's mind as though his brain had furnished the track instead of hers. But he knew that to betray the faintest consciousness would be a breach of manners; so he looked impassive and answered from the surface.

"He war in town day afore yestiddy. In er mighty hurry too. He come in ter ther Black B'ar 'bout sundown to bresh off ther dust an' get hisse'f er toddy. He war spicked an' spanned bran' new, like er man er gwine co'tin'. I hearn him ax er man what stood close by how ther folks all war at you-uns. Ther fellow 'lowed that all war well fer you-un had er party gwine on, an' lads an' lassies guthered. 'Twar Aaron Spot ther young fellow war talkin' to, an' Aaron larfed, he did, an' 'lowed thar'd be er weddin' shortly. Ther signs war rank fur thet, he said, an' Dr. Ravenel hed been scrapin' his wing round ther parson's fur *nigh er year, an' 'twar er blind man what couldn't*

see it. Young Martyn curdled in er minute. He kep' er tight rein ; but he took his liquor like it had been inspected an' sot ther glass down hard enuf to bust ther bottom out, an' walked straight out'n ther place 'thout treatin' ther crowd, which ain't no ways natu'l to him. I 'lowed ter Aaron thet he war a fool to say ther word, seein' ez *he* hadn't been sot ter watch ther bilin' o' nobody's kittle. He grinned, but 'twar on ther north side o' his jaw, fur he'd lost er free drink along o' we-un—an' ther pay fur all, bein' ez ther bar is his'n. He won't be so forred soon agin I sorter reckon."

The minister's wife pondered the situation long and carefully, and came to a conclusion in regard to it which was communicated the following afternoon by Maud to Dr. Ravenel.

The young lady had been out walking ; up the hillside for wild flowers. Her hands and little basket were filled with them and her beautiful face was becomingly touched with color. Dr. Ravenel overtook her and dismounting walked on by her side, the horse following.

"It seems a pity to go away when the woods are so lovely, doesn't it?" she said, raising her lustrous eyes and then letting them sink to the blossoms in her hands. "See these beauties! I got them near that spring over in the Monteiths' pasture. The doctor's big gray horse was there, but he was very affable ; he lifted up his head and

whinnied, but when he found it wasn't Jean, he went on grazing."

"Are you going away?" demanded Ravenel. "What for?"

"To visit kindred," she answered, smiling. "Mother has an old aunt living in Huntsville whom she hasn't seen for years, and I have never seen at all. We are going to visit her, and will be away for weeks, so our friends will have time to forget us."

"Do you think that likely?" His voice was low, and his hand lingered on hers as he took the flowers from her; he bent his head and tried to look into her eyes.

But Maud was a thorough coquette. She avoided his glance and let a little pout curve her full lips.

"You will console yourselves with Jean Monteith, you sorrowing friends of ours," she answered, provokingly. "She is a woman with 'brains in her head, a woman worth talking to'—that's what you said the other night. A little *ignoramus* like me can't hope to be remembered when Jean is here."

She raised her eyes to his slowly, so that he should have full benefit of the upward sweep of the lovely lashes; but if she expected to meet sentiment and asseveration, she was doomed to disappointment. She had looked up a little too *late*. Jean's name had dashed across his mood

and changed its direction. His eyes were on the road beyond, and as they passed Dr. Monteith's gate, he turned his head and gazed up at the house, although Maud was speaking.

He was not so discreet, however, when they said good-by a few nights later at the parsonage gate. She was in white, with roses on her breast; the moonlight silvered her dress, and intensified her beauty, and wove a magic spell around them. Her hands, white as milk, rested together on the old gate. Her head was thrown back, and her lips trembled; a tear hung on the curling lashes, and her bosom rose and fell hurriedly.

Moonlight, opportunity and a fair woman — what better combination possible for a man's undoing! Ravenel had no intention of asking Maud to be his wife; was not fully conscious of the need of a wife at all; yet when the moonlight made stars of the tears on her lashes, and deep lucent pools of her eyes, he lost his head, as most other men would have done, and folded his arms around her and bent his face down on hers, and whispered words which he had better have left unspoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE weeks glided on quietly, and summer ripened toward autumn. The Tinsleys remained away, going from Huntsville to some place of resort in the North Carolina mountains, bearing the millionaire in their train. In August, Mr. Tinsley joined them, and for awhile the parsonage was closed and Jean Monteith deprived of the link connecting her with the social world, and, what is more to the purpose, of the supervision of the friend who considered herself divinely appointed to hold the erratic young woman to an orbit which should not too violently intersect those of her neighbors.

Winthrope also remained away, detained by business complications arising from the maddening state of entanglement in which his Virginia kinsman had left his estate. He wrote to Jean regularly, long, pleasant letters, which she read with interest and answered or not, as she liked. She missed him in an abstract way; but her thoughts and life were so full now that nothing outside seemed of much consequence.

During the evening they had spent together, *Jean* had tried to draw Ravenel to her by every

means in her power. Her nature was as devoid of coquetry as a man's could be, so the ordinary feminine wiles were beyond her; she had no tricks of lip or glance, no coyness of retreat and advance. She simply brought to bear a powerful nature, concentrated by one dominant desire, and by the force so generated sought to hold Ravenel as a magnet holds steel.

Soon after his entrance into the room, he had found himself beside her, and had remained half-fascinated, half-bewildered, so different did she seem from any woman he had ever talked with. When the inevitable move toward the piano had been made, he had entreated Jean to sing to him; for the strains that had held him spellbound, still lived in his memory, and awakened at times like melodious haunting echoes. But Jean would not. She could only sing when the mood was on her, she said, and never in a light place with people looking at her and talking. He must come to see her and then she would sing; in the gloaming he must come, when all things were still and Nature herself could listen.

Ravenel had gone, and gone again, and yet again, for Jean slowly and insensibly took firmer and firmer hold of him. He did not love her in those days; or if he did, he was unconscious of it. She possessed his intellect and filled all the large spaces of his nature. She kept his interest at high pressure and stimulated him as he had never

been stimulated before. In her presence, his mind seemed to act with a clearness and force lacking at other times. In talking with her, he often astonished himself by the depth, lucidity, and brilliancy of his thought. She seemed to get hold of every thing he had ever known, studied, or experienced, and bring it out of him in language that fitted the subject as a well-made glove fits a strong, beautiful hand.

It was a source of ever deepening wonder to him that what he had heretofore considered a circumscribed life and limited experience, under the vivifying warmth of her omnipresent interest, should literally teem with events worthy of narration. Incidents, illustrations, observations of men, and life, and nature; knowledge, of whose acquisition he had been scarcely conscious, flowed from his lips into the hungry brain so near, so intense, so unfalteringly persistent in its demands. Never before had Ravenel been so sensible of fullness of life, so exultantly vibrant in every fiber.

At first he sought to analyze the new force at work within him; but the only association of ideas which its manifestation evolved, was that of the initial action of a powerful drug. This did not please him, and he desisted from the investigation, and finally lost sight of the fact that he had ever wished to make it.

Not that he had forgotten Maud, or wished

unsaid the words he had whispered when they bade farewell. He loved her to the full as much as he had ever loved her ; he wrote to her with regularity and did not find the task onerous, he said the regulation things in the regulation way, and he meant every word he uttered. He expected to marry Maud in fullness of time, and to make her a first-rate husband ; but that did not prevent him, whenever he was alone with Jean Monteith, from forgetting that such a woman as Maud lived in the world.

Jean also was content. Her great gray eyes showed sunlight as well as shadow, her step grew more elastic, plaintive ballads and wild border songs, that her father had loved, rose to her lips unbidden and waked the echoes of the empty house, and drowned, at times, the eerie sobbing sound that for months had been its only voice.

Once when all the doors had chanced to be open, because of the warmth of the evening, Ravenel had turned his head at the sound and listened. A tender, sympathetic look had crossed his face, for he had heard the stories told by the village people. He had caught Jean's gaze fixed upon him, and had questioned, gently and pitifully, "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing," she had answered. "All has been done. The case is hopeless," and had gone quietly up-stairs and closed the doors.

He had asked no further questions, nor did she volunteer any information; but a more subtle sympathy had been established between them.

Yes, Jean was deeply content. It was well with the work, and so it was well with her. Her sympathy with her father had been so perfect, and her nature, in some directions, had been so abnormally developed, that she would try at times to project herself from the small *known* into the infinite, impenetrable *unknown* to find him, as it were, and communicate to him knowledge of her faithfulness.

Insensibly this feeling transferred itself to Ravenel, and as their intercourse deepened, she became more and more sensitive to his influence, more and more able to project her consciousness into his so as to gain from him in perfect fullness that which she needed to broaden and verify her thought, to enable her to vitalize the work which under her hand was rapidly drawing toward completion.

Never once did she lose sight of her primal object. In their talks she had guided him first over the ground she had traversed already, before pressing on with him to that to which her feet were strange. Above all things she wished to be thorough, for a haunting fear possessed her lest, through her, the work should suffer.

As her insight grew clearer, more unerring, she broadened her lines and experimented more boldly. *She took up* one by one her father's theories and

deduction, and presented them to Ravenel, watching the process of assimilation or rejection by the strong brain which she had chosen as a crucible ; taking them from him again, perhaps, new-born into nobler strength and beauty.

Gradually, but surely, the inevitable result followed: the spectrum gave not only lines but colors, and she failed utterly to realize that the light was from quite another luminary. Gradually more and more of Ravenel became incorporated with the book. Ravenel's deductions, experiences, conclusions, were woven in with those of Dr. Monteith until it would have been difficult to determine *which* mind dominated the work. And so deftly, so firmly had the new woof been thrown through the old warp that no flaw in the web was perceptible, and even the weaver herself was scarcely conscious of the thing she had done.

One sultry afternoon towards the latter part of August, Jean, bending over her father's desk, wrote slowly, thoughtfully, the closing sentences and pushed the manuscript from her. It was done. The fair white pages lay before her in attestation of her faithfulness. She was satisfied, triumphant, for, with some strange prescience, she was sure that what she had done had been well done. The name of Monteith would be honored, would take its place among names that *live*.

Rising, she laid the manuscript away, locking

the desk jealously, lest harm should befall it. Then she went out and had the big gray saddled and rode away into the forest. A fancy seized her to go over, to-day, when the work was done, the ground traversed that night eight months before when her vow had taken tangible shape. She turned her horse into the track leading up the mountain, away beyond the pines, to Danvers's cabin.

She had been there often since that night. The children were fond of her, notably the boy whose life she had saved. Danvers himself considered Jean the most wonderful woman in the world, and his sad-faced wife shared the opinion.

When Jean rode into the clearing, Danvers was away in the cornfield pulling fodder and tying the long green blades in bundles against the denuded stalks for sun and air to give them sweetness. Jean could see his old slouch hat and brawny shoulders through the corn. She did not call him; indeed it would have been useless, with the rustling of the fodder in his ears. A freckled-faced boy espied her from the ridge-pole of the cabin, whither he had climbed in defiance of a dare. He voiced his discovery at once and started to clamber down the uneven corner of the log chimney: the other children dodged out from behind the house and then dodged back, like young rabbits in a warren. One old hound raised his head, *and, scenting the horse, gave tongue, which roused*

half a dozen more who came in nobly in the chorus.

Jean slipped from her saddle and secured the gray to a horse shoe which had been nailed against the side of a tree, for the convenience of equestrians. Mrs. Danvers brought out a split-bottomed chair and a great, cool gourd of water fresh from the spring, and moved her spinning-wheel on to the porch, so that she might entertain her guest without interruption to her work. Little Ferg sidled up to Jean with his finger in his mouth, and twitched the whip from her unresisting hand, and with it so belabored the gray about the heels that the animal lashed out and came within an ace of braining him. Then Jean caught him up and took the whip away. The boy from the ridge-pole came and sat on the steps at Jean's feet, and offered her a baby turtle the size of a quarter. He had found the nest of a fresh water-turtle down by the trout pool, he said, and had hatched the eggs inside of his shirt.

The afternoon was breathless: the leaves on the trees drooped vertically; the hop vines clung close to the poles and showed limp clusters of blossoms touched with brown. The cypress-vines and morning-glories around the porch had drooped under the sun's fierce kisses; only the corn stood stiff and straight and held up tasseled heads like soldiers. The dogs lay about with their tongues out, and the chickens held their wings away from

their bodies, as a *danseuse* holds her dress. Away in the southeast great black clouds were banking up, and over toward the north heat lightning came in broad pale gleams, like the spirits of dead tornadoes.

After awhile, Jean mounted and rode away homeward, and Danvers came in from the field and scolded his wife for letting her go.

"Thar's gwine ter be er harrycane," he said. "An' ther pine woods air dangersome in er storm. You-uns ought ter hev kep' her. I'm tore up in mind about her. How long hev she been gone?"

The woman "disremembered." "Mebbe 'twar an' hour, mebbe not mor'n half thet long. Thar warn't no call to be oneasy. Miss Jean would ride hard. She know'd ther storm war comin'. Twer foolishness to get harried."

But Danvers would not be content ; he stood in the doorway and watched the gathering of the storm with a brow as troubled as the sky. The clouds had mustered strong and swept upward towards the zenith in an inky mass. Thunder growled, and lightning cut the distance with lines of fire. The wind moaned through the tree-tops and made them shiver. It had not gathered full strength, but tossed and wailed with impatience for the advent of aerial re-enforcements to give it power to race and tear through the pines, to bend the great trees and snap them off like saplings.

"Whose thet a-comin' 'cross ther clearin'?"

questioned Danvers sharply, leaning forward and peering through the gloom, "I wish ter God t'war Miss Jean!" He stepped out on the porch.

Mrs. Danvers peered out in her turn, more keen-sighted than her husband.

"'Tis ther doctor," she announced. "He air comin' back frum Johnson's Mill. They've got er ailin' baby. I seen him pass gwine. Ax him ter 'light an' hitch t'well ther rain's over."

She drew back into the house and laid fresh wood on the fire.

Ravenel came from the opposite direction from Melrose and rode fast. As he neared the cabin, he threw himself from his horse and with a nod and wave of the hand to Danvers, led the animal to the stable and let him in. Then he came around to the porch and the two men shook hands.

"There'll be a terrible storm directly," he said; "the air is like a furnace, and the wind is rising slowly—that always means mischief. Are the children all safe, and the brutes housed?"

"Yes," Danvers answered, looking about with troubled eyes. "Thar's gwine ter be er cracker. Listen ter thet!" as a roar, like a concentrated earthquake, seemed to shiver silence and cause the universe to rock and vibrate. "Thet struck somewhars, in ther pines I reckon. God A'mighty! ef Miss Jean should be thar! Ef I know'd—ef I jes' *could* know she war safe t'other side\."

Ravenel turned, his face blanching, a great horror in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded hoarsely. "What's that about Jean? Where is she?"

He used her name unconsciously, nor did Danvers notice.

"She war here," he explained; "she left afore ther storm got nigh. I dunno how long. I war in the field or she shouldn't er gone. I didn't know she hed started. She war on ther doctor's gray an' he's good ter travel. Maybe she got through the woods afore ther storm broke."

Ravenel caught the mountaineer by the arm with a grasp that made him wince, and bending forward looked him in the face.

"Do you believe it?" he demanded. "Can you *swear* that she had time? No: you dare not. You *know* she's down in that infernal wood—alone in this hellish storm."

"I dunno, I tell yer!" repeated the man doggedly. "How kin I know? I never seen her start."

"You *do* know! Damn you, you *know* she's there! God above!—and the horse! Which way did she go?" shaking him roughly.

"Ther nighest way," replied Danvers, jerking his arm free, "right through ther pines. I'd er foller'd her if thar'd been any use."

The sentence was spoken to the wind and the storm, for Ravenel was already half across the

clearing. As he entered the forest Danvers saw the light straw hat lifted from his head and whirled away across the corn-rows. He followed it with his eye, then dragged his own limp wool structure firmly down and struck out across the clearing in Ravenel's track.

The hurricane had lashed itself to fury: through the pines the wind raved and tore like a sentient creature frenzied: trees bent and cracked, and every moment or two a pine less firmly rooted than its fellows would fall with a sickening crash, bearing down all lesser growth in its path. The atmosphere was so surcharged that each lightning flash seemed to set the air aflame, and the roar of the thunder, prolonged by the reverberation of the mountains, was one unbroken tempest of sound. The storm was at its height; but as yet not a drop of rain had fallen.

Ravenel pushed on as rapidly as possible, leaping over prostrate tree-trunks, swerving aside to avoid falling branches. No thought of his own peril touched him; mind and heart and being responded to but one thought—Jean alone with the storm—Jean alone with death in that terrible forest—and the urgency of haste.

How slowly his limbs moved! How wildly his imagination leaped forward and rioted amid awful possibilities. With ingenuity that seemed devilish, with every hideous detail as vivid as lightning, it showed him Jean, ghastly, bleeding, life-

less, crushed by a falling tree, dashed to death by the maddened horse. Death the most cruel—death the most horrible flamed before his eyes and brought home to him in one lurid glare the knowledge that if this thing had happened, if it should happen, all light and joy and hope would go out of the universe for him forever. He staggered as he ran; but he could not think yet, only feel and suffer and press on.

Half-way down the mountain he found her, standing quietly beside a great pine tree with her arm around the horse's neck. She had taken off her long veil and bound it over his eyes to shut out the glare, and held his head against her shoulder. The gray trembled in every nerve and almost crouched in his terror. Jean spoke to him soothingly, forgetful of her own danger. She looked up as Ravenel caught her hands in his and tried to force a smile to her pale lips; but the look in his eyes made the brave soul within her quail and sicken for an instant, death seemed so near.

"Come!" he said, and passing his arm around her he half led, half-carried her to where a great limestone boulder jutted up, and formed a vertebra of the spine of rocks that divided the mountain from base to summit.

In the lee of the rock they were somewhat sheltered, and Ravenel took Jean in his arms and laid her face against his breast and sheltered it with *his hand*.

And presently there came a rush and whirl like the beating of wings when myriads of birds return to the roosting-place, and with it the rain. The horse moved and whinnied softly, and, with a great throb of thankfulness, Ravenel felt that the worst was over.

CHAPTER XV.

THE neighbors viewed the intimacy between Jean and Dr. Ravenel with an interest only possible in rural communities and the affair divided public attention with the on-coming fall elections. Jean and the county candidates usurped the popular mind and plied in its depths, like buckets in a well, one up, one down, and so on *ad infinitum*. Where two or three were gathered either at the corner groceries, or on the porch of the Black Bear, almost any odds would have been safe that the subject of their discourse was Abimelech Claasby, the man who was running for sheriff, or Jean Monteith.

"Ef ther parson's daughter don't come back soon an' look arter her own, she won't have nothin' to look arter," remarked old Jack Johns reflectively; "young Ravenel hev been out to ther doctor's place three times this week an' thet sorter snaps o' bizness. I've kep' er tally o' ther times so thar'd be no room fur lyin'. Three notches air upon my stick, er notch fur every visit. Ther ole 'ooman 'lowed I'd better time ther time he staid ;

both trembling hands a moment, and then drew back and closed the door.

In his own room he changed his dripping garments and lighted a fire, and drank a great goblet of brandy-and-water, seeking by extraneous means to divert the current of his thought and get himself sane once more. His mind refused to grapple with the problem which he knew that he must solve, and busied itself with physical conditions. His hands were cold ; he stretched them toward the blaze ; but the fire, newly lighted, burned with moderation and reserve, giving out heat charily. Ravenel kicked the brands together irritably, and reaching over, poured out another glass of brandy which he left untasted on the table. The soaked boots he had taken off stood beside the hearth in a pool of dirty-looking water. Ravenel's eye fell on them and he rose and threw them into a closet.

Then he went into the outer room, for a cigar, he told himself, but he did not take one from the box. Instead, he lifted the blue plush frame from among the books and papers on his table and opened the tiny doors. A face, fair as an artist's ideal, with eyes of sapphire-blue and lips arched as the bow of Love, smiled out at him. It was the face of Maud Tinsley.

Ravenel gazed at it earnestly, striving to understand the change within himself. The face was as beautiful—more beautiful, in fact, than he

remembered it : in a far-off way its old fascination was reflected upon him, like sunshine cast from a mirror. He looked at it strangely, as at a thing familiar, and yet changed. Emotions, complex, vivid, commingled, made chaos of his mind; remorse, shame, pity, tenderness, and wild longing for freedom rioted through his being. Like a restive steed in galling harness, he champed and tore at his bit. An impulse rose to curse his own folly—his precipitation: then the thought came that this woman loved him, trusted him, believed, and with reason, that he loved her, and he took the ignoble impulse by the throat and forced it under foot.

Ravenel glanced about with troubled eyes, the picture still in his hand. To his abnormally excited perception, Jean's presence seemed to fill the room. Here, just where he was standing, *she* had stood that day when he had come in and found her ministering to the wounded man. Here she had helped him, worked with him, bravely, intelligently, patiently. Her pale face with its wonderful eyes rose and thrust itself between him and the pictured face in his hand. He trembled and his breath came in short, hard gasps, broken and hurried like that of a man undergoing violent physical exertion.

What was it that she had said that day? Her face had blanched as the saw in his hand had *grated* on the bone of the mangled limb; but her

hand had been steady, and when he would have stopped, would have spared her, she had lifted brave eyes to his and said, "I can stand it. Go on. I will not fail you."

Had she *ever* failed man, or woman, or child who trusted her!—this woman who held loyalty so high, who counted pain to herself as dross beside the gold of unbroken faith! And he! Slowly a flush of shame rose to his brow; slowly a feeling as though his involuntary treachery had lowered manhood germinated and sent down bitter roots in his heart. He closed the picture gently and put it from him, and dropping into a chair leaned his head forward on his folded arms.

He had held himself high, proud of his stainless honor, proud of grand resolve, of untried, and therefore certain constancy. His standard had been noble, and no thought of a possibility of falling below it had crossed him until now. It was hard to adapt himself to the new conditions, to find himself fallible like others. Dishonor seemed to have touched him close, and he could not, for the time, readjust his environment with this bitter sense of humiliation added.

He had no mercy on himself. He had dealt his self-esteem a blinding blow and, in the recoil, he was as hard as adamant, meting out judgment down to the vinegar and the hyssop, and never realizing, physician though he was, that he was in no condition to judge fairly. That the over-

strained physical state interacting with the overstrained mental state produced a reflex of emotion which precluded any rational outlook at the situation.

The rain had ceased: the clouds, broken and tumbled into masses, were drawing away to the north-west, leaving a pure deep canopy of blue. Rain-drops hung on the eaves of the houses and on the trees and bushes, and the sun came out and made them sparkle like jewels, and a little frolicsome breeze, deserter from the storm-wind's ranks, playfully shook them down into the lap of the tender sweet-breathed earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

THEY went homeward slowly through the pouring rain, Ravenel leading the gray, for the path was blocked with fallen branches, and in some places with prostrate trees, over which the horse was forced to jump or scramble. When they reached the open road, he lifted Jean to the saddle and walked on beside her with his hand on the gray's rein.

The silence between them was unbroken, for nature deeply stirred finds speech inadequate. Once when the horse stumbled Ravenel glanced up and bade her tighten her rein. She did so and smiled, a wan smile, like moonlight on snow. It chilled him, although he could not have explained why.

At the house he would not come in, declining almost roughly, and only waiting long enough for Jean to get him a hat and rubber coat that had been her father's. As he stood on the porch, the eerie sobbing sound floated down to him from the upper room; it made him shiver. Then Jean came and brought him the things, and gave him

but that looked to me onhandsome. All 'ooman-folks air pertickler 'bout small *gnats* o' things; but ther main fac's o' a case air what er man will look to. Thar's ther stick I notched 'em on an' ef you-uns think I'm lyin', why, whirl right in an' count 'em."

He extended, for inspection, a hickory stick with a crook at the end, and tilted his chair back on its hind legs so that his shoulders might rest against the house-side. The stick passed from hand to hand, and the notches were counted, and felt by every horny thumb in the group. The tally was regarded by all as damning evidence, and Maud's chances were felt to be past praying for.

"Naix week may show er rise t'other side," drawled Aaron Spot from his place at the bar-room window. Not that he really thought so, but that he disliked Jack's verdict to be considered as final.

"How come so?"

It was Danvers who put the question.

"Bekase ther parson's family air comin' home day arter to-morrow. Thar cook, Betsy, come here this mornin' arter home-made soap, to do some scourin' an' cleanin' up agin ther mistis come. She telled ther news while ther old 'ooman was a weighin' it. Ther parson's daughter kin hold her own, I reckon'. She's pretty enouf to fool er man's haid clean off'n his shoulders."

"Pretty ain't all," gloomily observed a lantern-jawed man. "Looks ain't no mor'n Jack-my-

lanterns. Ther brightest flashes is gin'elly over ther wuss swamp-holes, an' ther fool thet's blinded by ther shine plumps right in, neck an' crop, afore he knows which er way he's gwine. Looks, th'out somethin' mo' 'count behind 'em, ain't wuth er second-hand damn."

This remark was received without comment. The lantern-jawed man spoke from fullness of experience and his words had weight. One or two young men looked as though they might dissent, but refrained for fear of painful argument. Danvers asked his nearest neighbor for a "chaw," and old Jack, who happened to be flush, ordered drinks for the crowd and slapped down the money for them with the importance of a man to whom the possession of money is a rarity. When the liquor had been disposed of the subject was resumed.

"Miss Maud hev got another string to her bow, anyhow. She ain't 'bleeged to pester 'long o' ther doctor fur lack o' game. It hev been 'lowed ter me thet ther oil-mill man likes there swing o' ther parson's front gate mightily," observed Aaron Spot.

"Ther oil-man hev got er sight o' truck—stocks an' bonds, an' money. He's er likely man to look at too, an' free-handed ez er candidate when ther polls air open. Martyn ain't no fellow to be sneezed at—an' ther truck air bound to make some dif'ence." Such was Jack's opinion.

"Not ef she loves ther doctor," eagerly interposed a very young man with very light hair. "Ef er gal is sweet on er man truck *can't* make no dif'ence to her."

A loud guffaw greeted this ebullition of sentiment. The young fellow grew hot and red and felt "pins and needles" all through his system: he looked defiant too, and resolved to maintain his position.

"You-uns kin he-haw like a damn lot o' sorry mules ef you-uns air a mind to," he said, hotly. "It don't hurt nothin' 'cept yer own breedin'. But all ther same, I ses, ef Miss Maud keers er gun-wad fur ther doctor she'll holt on to him in spite o' fifty oil-mill fellows—an' in spite o' Miss Jean too."

Danvers turned around in his chair and regarded the speaker threateningly.

"Drap it!" he growled, "drap it right *thar*, an' don't you-un *never* take it up no more, or I'll strangle ther breath out'n yer durned win'pipe. You-un air *darin'* ter 'low thet Miss Jean hev slipped in fur ther under-grip. 'Tain't in her! She'd scorn to pull Dick, pull devil, fur any man. She air er chip o' ther old block, an' thar ain't er man in ther deestrect but what know'd ther doctor—solid timber, through an' through; not er frost-rift or a wind-shake in him. *Thet's* ther way ther Monteiths grow, an' ther man that 'lows *dif'ent air a liar*. I ses thet word to one an' all, an'

I stands here squar to back it. Ef Ravenel air man enouf to git Miss Jean, an' frum er thing er two I've noticed I sorter holds him stedd' fur a *man*, I reckon he'll have gumption enouf to know he'll hev got cause to thank God, settin' an' standin', fur ther balance o' his life."

"Thet's er true word, every lick," chimed in a tall, one-armed man who had joined the group unnoticed. "Thar's cleaner grit an' more gold to it in thet young woman then you'd meet in er year's prospectin'. She's er solid nugget, thet's what she is, an' whoever gits her will have er fortune. It takes ther real right sort to do er thing like *she* done fur me—standin' by me an' wipin' off ther grease an' sweat with her own hank'cher, an' never er thought o' herself, or her dress, thet was swishin' agin them damn dirty over-alls o' mine, to hinder her from helping me. Nothin' in her sweet, clean mind 'ceptin' ther knowledge o' *my* pain, an' the thought thet we both war humans. *Her* sort come from ther Master's hand straight, 'thout no go-betweens to mess an' spile 'em. God bless her!"

This seemed to round off the subject for the time and it was allowed to drop. Soon the group dispersed, and Danvers lounged away homeward, turning over something in his mind of which he would not speak, even to his wife. It was something he had witnessed during the storm two days before—a sheltered nook under the lee of a

great gray rock ; a horse, trembling and cowering with fright ; a man standing erect and firm, sheltering a woman against his breast.

He had drawn back with instinctive delicacy, for the look on Ravenel's face had told the story. He had not mentioned it to any one, had hardly let himself think of it even, for he was a true-hearted man to whom such things were sacred.

It seemed a pity that they should not be so to others—to Miss Parma Wright for instance. The affair commended itself to that lady as most opportune, and she rolled it over in her mind and dwelt on it with unction. In her eyes, jaundiced by jealous dislike, Jean's conduct admitted of no palliation or excuse; it was treacherous, indecorous, well-nigh indecent. With subtle arts and deliberate intention, and in that other woman's absence, Jean had drawn another woman's lover from his allegiance ; without a duenna she was receiving almost daily visits from men ; at a time when any well-conducted young woman, with a soul and body to save, would have been praying in the middle of a feather-bed, *this* young woman was getting herself caught in a thunder-storm alone with a man, and returning home with him on the edge of dark, disheveled and drenched • and hatless.

It had been Ravenel, not Jean, who had been hatless, and the time had been five o'clock in the

afternoon, which is a long way off the edge of dark in summer. The negro who had told the story had mentioned both these circumstances; but Miss Parma liked Rembrandt effects.

She kept unusually quiet, saying little and watching much, not wanting gossip to circulate with sufficient violence to put Jean, or what would be more likely, Ravenel, on guard. Jean was of course quite hopeless; but, if unduly warned, Ravenel might draw back before matters should get so tangled as to put the unraveling of them beyond the power of any man save Ravenel himself.

That was the great point; to let things get to such a pass that Clive Winthrope should have his eyes opened at once and forever. To secure this, Miss Parma went the length of holding her tongue, and even of saying charitable things without any sting in the tail of them, about Jean Monteith. Jean should be allowed rope enough to hang herself: on that Miss Parma was determined.

Poor little Jean!

But while Miss Parma could bridle her own tongue, she could not force the bit between Miss Elsworth's teeth, dearly as she would have liked to. So it came to pass that the Rev. Arthur Tinsley, away for a holiday in the Carolina mountains, received one morning a letter bearing the

Melrose post-mark. This the good man read, and, without showing it to his wife, destroyed; and the next day started homeward with his family.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAUD was restless and ill at ease ; the shadow of coming unhappiness touched her. She was not clever, but the emotional instinct of all women, even of the dullest, is sensitive to the fluctuations of the emotional atmosphere. When a woman is in love, this sensitiveness increases until her feelings are like aspen leaves, responsive to aerial currents imperceptible to grosser matter.

Maud loved Theodore Ravenel as much as it was in her nature to love any one, and according to her lights she was loyal to him. During her absence, delighted with the admiration and homage attracted by her beauty and enjoying herself after the manner of girls, she had flirted a great deal. Led on by youth and spirits she had encouraged men, perhaps, and had played the old game in the old way, but under it all had lain the thought of Ravenel like that of hidden treasure. The ground in which it rested might be a trifle sterile ; but of that the owner was unconscious, realizing that the treasure was there, and was *hers*. Perhaps the latter fact constituted the treasure's

chiefest value, for Maud had an innate appreciation of the adage "what is mine, *is* mine."

Be that as it may, she was true to Ravenel according to her nature. When men talked love to her vaguely, she smiled; but when the vagueness vanished the smile vanished with it. She had discarded the millionaire, when he spoke to her, with promptness and decision, thereby bringing down upon her head her mother's censure, diversified with lamentations. It is needless so say that, with an indulged young woman like Maud, both censure and lamentations passed literally into one ear and out of the other. She was "sorry mamma should be disappointed," and said so prettily, sealing the light regret with a kiss as light. And there, as far as Maud was concerned, the matter ended.

Nevertheless she thought exceedingly well of herself and of the nobility of her conduct, and was very sure that the devotion of a lifetime on Ravenel's part would barely suffice to meet the interest he owed on her investment of constancy.

During the week which had elapsed since her return home, Maud had become conscious of a change in Ravenel. He was more attentive to her than he had been formerly, more solicitous to please her; but his attentions had no soul, and he was only externally responsive to the pleasure which he strove to evoke. At first Maud did not notice, being filled with herself and her own *adventures* and quite willing to monopolize the

conversation. Ravenel listened with painstaking attention, wondering wearily why it should all sound so trivial and commonplace. She was more beautiful than ever, he acknowledged, and she had been improved by her flight into the outside world—her horizon had been enlarged and her thought enriched. But she was not Jean, and it was for Jean that his very soul yearned.

He kept a tight rein over himself and avoided Jean, even all mention of her name, and set honor and truth and manhood before him, and chalked out a path for himself and swore to follow it to the end, though his heart should wither in his breast. He had asked Maud to be his wife, had told her that he loved her, and the task he sternly set himself was not only to fulfill his word by making her his wife, but to compel his heart to atone for its involuntary disloyalty.

It seemed a hopeless task, but the man was young, his grasp on that which to him appeared the right was of iron, and the blood of the old French Huguenot, who had braved death and accepted banishment as the price of loyalty to a faith, was hot in his veins.

The strain told upon his nerves and, in spite of his best endeavor, made him moody and fitful, and Maud gradually awakened to the change and worried him about it, seeking to know its cause and upbraiding him for its existence. It was hard on her that there should be a change, for she

loved Ravenel, and if her love were not a diamond of the first water, it was the noblest jewel she possessed, and she had made sacrifices for its sake. And it was doubly hard on him, for she was not magnanimous enough to refrain from alluding to the sacrifices and letting him see that she held a mortgage on his gratitude.

Poor Ravenel, his honor and manhood applauded her conduct, admitting with shame that she had stood firm where he had fallen; but his sick heart revolted against the knowledge of this additional claim, and, in some moods, was fain to curse constancy and die.

It was not long before the talk of the village came to Maud's ears. The impression everywhere was that Ravenel was "courting" Jean Monteith. It was the village word and used *ad libitum* to cover ground which might be a man's simple pleasure in a woman's society, or the path to the steps of the altar. How the general impression made itself felt, Maud could not tell—it was in the air; who told her, or whether any one told her, she did not know. It seemed that every look and tone and glance proclaimed the fact—that even the stones of the village streets forced in upon her consciousness the opinion of the village that Ravenel was "courting" Jean Monteith.

At first, Maud did not believe it. Knowing her own attractiveness, and thinking lightly of *Jean's*, the thing appeared impossible. *She* was

a woman of flesh and blood, a rarely beautiful woman too, her mirror told her, while Jean, in her eyes, was a scientific abstraction. How could a man love Jean? Jean did not care for the things that other women cared for—the joy of life's small happenings, the excitement of new garments, the pleasure of dabbling in social rills, the bliss of neighbors' affairs, the glory of flirtation, all these were beyond her realm of thought. Jean lived in a world of her own—a world of space—a world of mountains, forests, torrents, giant cliffs and deep mysterious gorges—a world of limitless distances, of sudden storm and vivid sunlight; a world filled with the grandeur of silence, the immensity and truth and majesty of nature. What could a man do with his daily life amid surroundings like these?

Not that Maud thought of Jean, or pictured the future in metaphor. Her imagination was a wingless ant that ran hither and thither on the ground with dried grasshopper legs of commonplace fact on its head. What she thought was that Jean, being an abstraction, would not keep the parlor neat, or put embroidered, silken things on the tables and chairs, or peacock's feathers on the walls; that she would not remember what dishes a man liked best, or to have his coat brushed for him, or even to have the napkins changed every day.

Maud knew, if she had thought about it, that

the old-fashioned parlor at the Monteiths' had a restful air, and always smelt of flowers; that the table was well appointed, and that the doctor's tired feet had seemed to find his slippers as if by magic; but it had never occurred to her to associate these things with Jean.

Jean loved study and science and research, the big things that men loved, therefore men could not love *her*. To Maud, this seemed rational and natural. She believed in the attraction of opposites, but knew nothing of the more powerful elective affinity of likeness in difference. Being material, she could not rise above the material plane; she was acutely conscious of her own beauty and that Jean, barring her eyes, was not even pretty. A man must love best that which is most worthy of love, and, to Maud's feeling, the palm rested with physical perfection.

Still, the thought of Jean, roused by the village influence, would not leave her, and under it her sluggish imagination quickened and memories of nursery tales of elves and sprites came back and mingled with other, stronger, tales of necromancy, the black art, the Lorelei and the Were-wolf, and with Hebrew legends of Possession. And out of the medley grew a conviction that the people who had employed fire as a preventive and corrective of witchcraft, were not without justification, and the feeling that if Jean were guilty of *the thing* laid at her door, it must have been by

occult means; and that fagot and flame should be her portion.

Had she been a wise and sympathetic woman, she would have felt that Ravenel was in trouble, and would, by tenderness and consideration, have helped him to be true. As it was, she was only a jealous and angry woman and made of her own truth a whip wherewith to lash him. Not that she made an open boast, she only kept it in the foreground and suggested contrasts. She had not even the sense to let Jean alone, but constantly made her the topic of insinuation and remark, showing him how Jean was given over to unfeminine pursuits, and devoid of heart and feeling; showing him indirectly, also, how far in her (Maud's) estimation Jean was below herself in things pertaining to true womanhood. *She* cared nothing for extraneous matters; but knew all about love and the sacrifices that love required.

Then she would rest her head on Ravenel's shoulder and plait her fingers into his and turn her fair face to him. Were they not engaged, and was not he in some sort her possession? And Ravenel would inwardly writhe and feel that her love was a shirt of Nessus, and that he was doomed to wear it all of his life. Then, because she was fair, and it was his right, and she expected it, he would touch her lips with his and wish to God that he loved her as she thought he did, and almost blaspheme because he did not.

What would have been Ravenel's line of conduct had the thought that Jean might return his love ever crossed his mind it is hard to say, though it is probable, so honorable was the nature of the man, so deep his reverence for his word, that he would still have given Maud and himself every chance to regain their former footing. But as yet, no thought of Jean in such connection with himself was present in his consciousness. Even on the mountain, during the storm, when he had held her in his arms and sheltered her on his breast, his terror for her safety, his relief at finding her unharmed, the need of guarding her, the realization of his love for her, all this had made such tumult in his brain as to benumb perception; and Jean had been so quiet, so self-contained, there had been no electric shock of intuition. It was all so new, so overwhelming to him that, even now, though weeks had passed, his mind failed to grasp the subject in its entirety, to realize the complexity of the situation. He could only hold to his promise, and struggle manfully to revivify the corpse of his troth.

Once Maud went too far. She had been talking of Clive Winthrope, who had just returned, and of what the village people were saying about his attachment to Jean Monteith. It would be a very suitable match, Maud thought, quite sensible and proper. Winthrope was no longer young, *and would not be exacting in the matter of senti-*

ment. He would take care of Jean and help her with her science, and look after the house himself, if she should forget, and not expect too much in the way of love. Jean was incapable of loving any one, there was no love in her; she was not like other women, Miss Parma and the other ladies said so.

Then Ravenel lost all self-control and pushed her away from him almost roughly. He damned Miss Parma and the rest with vigor and comprehensiveness, and said, quite low, but with flashing eyes, that to measure Jean Monteith's nature by that of other women would be as impossible as to gauge light by the flare of a torch. That she "was *sui generis*, a wonder among women, and that all attempt to define her was as much beyond the ordinary intelligence as the infinite is beyond the finite." Much more in the same extravagant strain, he said, until, chancing to catch sight of Maud's face, he paused in the middle of a sentence, conscious in every fiber of his being that she did not understand one-half that he was saying, and that she thought that he was behaving in an ungentlemanly manner.

He caught his breath hard, and squared his shoulders. Then, feeling that he tightened his harness, but compelled by very manhood, because the woman loved him and he owed her faith, he pulled himself up with all his force and made himself apologize for his loss of self-control.

Maud was deeply offended and, as she thought, with cause. Ravenel had set another woman on high, when she herself should have been his ideal. Ravenel had sworn at her friends, and indirectly at her; and—last and deepest offense—he had deliberately pushed her from him. Maud's heart swelled, and the tears came into her eyes, and she felt that she hated Jean because of these things. It was all the fault of Jean from beginning to end—Jean, who was born to be a trouble to every body. Maud set her teeth and wished with all her strength that evil might befall Jean for the thing she had done.

After awhile, she forgave Ravenel, feeling that by so doing she earned a place among the immortals, and feeling also that the coals of fire she heaped on his head ought to scorch him.

CHAPTER XVII.

AS days went on, there grew in Maud's mind a morbid desire to see her rival, to look into her eyes and listen to her voice. In a vague way she felt that Jean must be changed, must bear the Cain-mark of her iniquity on her brow.

In church, she glanced curiously across at the place Jean sometimes occupied; but she was not there.

Her attendance at church had always been irregular; indeed it was a stationary grievance in the minds of the minister's womenkind against Jean—her neglect, or at best, intermittent performance of that which they conceived to be her religious duty.

"She cares nothing for observances," fretted Mrs. Tinsley, "and that's one reason why people talk about her. She hardly ever comes to church, and she ought to. Not to do so is disrespectful to her Maker."

"I don't quite see the premise," observed the minister. "To my thinking, disrespect to one's Maker involves disobedience to his law, and there

is no law ordaining that people shall go to church if they have no mind to. The two or three must be gathered together in spirit as well as in body, for the Lord to be in the midst of them. If what Jean hears in church doesn't bring her nearer to God and make her comprehension of divine law clearer, she does right to stay away."

Mrs. Tinsley moved impatiently. Her husband's large-mindedness was a rock of stumbling to her. She liked a well-defined theological plantation with a solid church wall, a gate and proper gate-keeper, and she thought it for the good of the world that people should be made to come inside and stay there. Tracts of country bounded by the horizon brought home a sense of vastness and individual responsibility, and a feeling that something might be expected of her in the way of working out her own salvation.

"You talk as if going to church were a matter of taste, not duty," she observed austerely. "I should think the anointed messenger of God would have a higher regard for his mission."

"If the anointed messenger of God delivers his message in such a manner that nobody wants to listen to him, the fault is his. Or he may try his best and still fail. What seems to me the bread of life, may be the veriest sawdust in Jean's mouth, and that without any fault of hers or mine. The case resolves itself into this: if Jean gets *more good* at home with her books, or wandering

in the forest, than she gets by listening to me, then Nature or books have God's message for her and not I. And in sticking to them in preference to me, she does God service."

"Yet Christ came to establish his Father's church among men, and requires that they shall meet together for worship and spiritual communion. I think you talk very strangely, Arthur—for a minister."

"My dear, I was God's *man* long before I became his minister, and I know that his ways are not as our ways. That's the mistake you make, Margaret; you will set limits to the limitless. Your god is simply yourself sublimated and invested with infinite authority. You would hound people to church. For what? Not to *feel* God's love in every fiber, but to hear me tell them how they ought to feel it. There's nothing divine in that sort of thing; it isn't even *big*, humanly speaking. And for the church—who is to say which *is* 'God's church'? Divine love isn't a lamp burning on any 'special altar,' in any particular sanctuary. It's the sun of the universe."

"If you feel that way, I wonder you should preach in church at all," remarked Mrs. Tinsley, coldly.

After twenty years of married life, her husband was still an enigma to her. Many of his thoughts were beyond her range, and his modes of expres-

sion set her teeth on edge, and prejudiced her against the verity behind them. With her the appearance counted for more than the thing, and while she knew her husband to be a good and noble man, she would have found him more satisfactory could she have measured him with her own foot-rule and ticketed him in inches.

The minister smiled, and put out his hand and patted hers.

"I preach, my dear, because of the complexity of human nature, and in a church because of its limitations. Interdependence makes it necessary for the few to think, and the many to take thought ready-made, even about God. Vessels had better be filled with man-made wine, provided the vintage be pure, than left empty or filled with rubbish. So we ministers supply a want, and fit in with the Divine economy. As to churches: my message might sound to me more noble delivered in the temple not made with hands—that of God's own light and air and infinite horizon; but the majority of people would be thinking all the time of the insufficiency of my voice to fill the space, or of the sunlight in their eyes, or of the discomfort of their positions on the ground."

There was silence for awhile, and then Mrs. Tinsley resumed the subject.

"Let the verities alone, Arthur, and look at the surface of the matter. Jean may do God service by staying away from church, or she may

not. Opinions on that point are likely to be various. But she is doing *man* no service at all, and herself an injury. To most people church-going is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and if there's no sign, people are going to say there's no grace. That isn't the worst, either. Jean's disregard of that which others most regard, sets public opinion against her, and when she does unusual things she gets harder judgment. It may not be right, or just, but it is *so*, and it's natural."

"Is any body judging Jean?"

The reflex of the trouble in Mrs. Tinsley's face was perceptible in her husband's voice when he put the question.

"Yes; they're always judging her. I don't know exactly what she has been doing, but there's a feeling in the air when Jean's name is mentioned that makes me know that something is wrong. Parma Wright was here this morning, and so elaborately charitable to Jean that I'm sure the poor child has been more than commonly imprudent. I've been so busy getting the house into habitable condition again, that I've thought of little else. But I'll get to the bottom of it before I'm many hours older. I'd have questioned Parma, except that I saw that she was burning to tell, and I didn't want her version. Impatient as Jean makes me with her hard-headedness, I'm fond of the child, and I don't choose Parma

Wright to talk to me about her. Parma couldn't be just to save her life."

"I've been among the people a good deal," said Mr. Tinsley, "and I've heard nothing at all unusual."

"And never would, though you went among them five times as often," responded his wife. "People show as little of the seamy side to you as possible, Arthur. I don't know what it is, but there is something in your sphere that forces meanness to hang back. People don't say spiteful or malicious things about each other, unprovoked, before you."

The minister turned the pages of his book with inattentive fingers.

"I'm glad Winthrop's home again," he said presently.

"So am I," observed the lady, "and my joy will be increased when I hear you pronounce the blessing over him and Jean Monteith."

"Does she love him?"

"Arthur, how can you?—at your age!" Her tone was one of reproach, mingled with expostulation. "It's her duty to love him. Clive Winthrop is a good match and a suitable match, and it will stop all this gossip about her."

Mr. Tinsley rose and laid aside his book.

"Where are you going?" questioned his wife.

"To see Jean. All this talk has troubled me

about the child. I feel as if she needed some one to stand by her."

As he left the room she called after him.

"Arthur, don't talk to Jean about Clive Winthrope. She's impracticable enough, goodness knows, already, without your grafting her with romance. For heaven's sake, don't intermeddle! A marriage with Clive would be the best thing in the world for Jean, and I know that it is what her father always wished for her."

Mr. Tinsley turned, with the knob of the door in his hand.

"There is small danger of my making or marring, Margaret," he said gravely. "I never had an active hand in any marriage except my own, and, please God, I never will have. The responsibility is too great."

In the hall he met his daughter Maud equipped for a walk. When she learned his destination, she slipped her hand in his arm and announced her intention of accompanying him.

"I want to see Jean, too," she said, "I was just going there."

It was a languid afternoon, damp and humid: there had been rain in the earlier part of the day, and the earth, like a warm, soaked sponge, rendered an account of moisture received, in diaphanous wreaths of vapor which rose perceptibly for a few inches, and then were caught in the web of atmospheric currents and dissipated.

The unpaved street was deserted, save for two small dogs quarreling over a bone, and a mocking-bird on a fence barking and growling in imitation and doing his malignant best to excite the combatants still more. The minister caught up the bone with the end of his cane and flung it to a distance. Maud laughed at the crest-fallen look of the two little curs when they discovered their bereavement, and the bird put his head on one side and trilled out an echo of her mirth.

"How human they are!" observed the minister amusedly. "That bird enjoyed the unexpectedness of the *denouement* with the zest of a gamin. I caught his eye as that bone flew over the fence, and I'm positive that he winked. He certainly laughed when you did."

Maud opened wide eyes at him. "That's only because it's their nature to reproduce sound, father," she responded in a text-book tone. "Birds and animals can't think; they have no imagination or reasoning power."

"How do you know that?" Mr. Tinsley demanded with a whimsical smile. "The elect—those honored with the confidence of the 'creeters,' think differently. You should talk to old Jack Johns about these matters. He maintains that a dog can run over a line of argument and arrive at a definite result, while a man is looking for his hat to start. That bird took in *the humor* of the situation just now much better

than you did, his actions showed it. And look at the understanding and sympathy of horses! Don't you suppose now that that horse knows that Ravenel is tired and also a bit depressed?"

Ravenel was crossing the street some distance in front of them. His hat was pulled down over his eyes, and he leaned slightly forward in the saddle, with relaxed muscles and the aspect of a man physically overdone. His hand rested on the horse's neck and the rein hung loose. The animal had fallen into a walk, and his head drooped. Ravenel did not see them, and passed on down the cross street leading to his stable.

Maud frowned.

"The horse is tired, too," she said. "He has been ridden hard and, perhaps, far. Theodore never thinks about his horse when he is interested in a case. He is almost as crazy about science and all that as Jean Monteith."

They turned in at the Monteiths' gate as she spoke. Her father made no response, and they proceeded up the walk in silence. Mammy met them at the door.

"Miss Jean's out in de garden, or de lot some-whar's," she said. "She'll be in pres'ny an' pow'ful glad to see you all. Walk in de parlor an' I'll send arter her. De house gits so lonesome dat she's 'bleeged to get 'way f'um it sometimes."

She would have ushered them into the parlor.

but the minister, who shrank from the formality of guest rooms, made his way at once to the study, where he could find a book and "a feeling of humanity," as he expressed it.

Maud would not come in at all, and stopped mammy when she would have gone in search of a messenger. There was no need of that, she said; she would wander around and look for Jean herself.

She stood a moment on the porch after mammy had gone up-stairs again. The sun was setting, and rested, a globe of red-hot splendor, in the tops of the pine trees over on Danvers' mountain; the density of the atmosphere made it possible to look at it with unflinching eyes. In the low places the vapor had condensed into mist which rested in opaque bars, like drapery of finest lawn, against the darkness of the hill-side.

Down the stairway and out through the open door, came that strange unnatural sound as of an animal in distress. Maud never remembered to have heard it so distinctly before. She shuddered, and an expression of disgust and repugnance lay like a shadow on her beautiful face.

She turned slowly and went down the pathway toward the lot where the doctor's horse was kept, to look for Jean.

What she wanted with Jean, she did not quite know, nor what she should say when she had *found her*. Her mind was dull and slow; but in

her consciousness was the feeling that Jean must be made to understand that Ravenel belonged to *her*. She wanted to sign-board her property, as it were, and warn off trespassers. Deep down in her heart too, lurked a vindictive feeling toward Jean, a desire to make her wince and suffer.

Jean was down by the little spring under the poplar tree. Her back was against the trunk of the tree and her hat lay on the ground at her feet: her hair had fallen down and rested in a mane on her shoulders. The big gray horse stood beside her; she put up her hand to his head, and drew it down to her and kissed him, and combed his fore-lock with her fingers. She looked unusually small and childish and insignificant, Maud thought, in contrast with the animal's great bulk.

Maud lifted her exquisite throat and advanced with assured tread. Nature had set her at advantage.

Jean welcomed her guest and proposed returning to the house at once; but Maud declined. She would only stop and chat a moment, and then she must go home: her mother would be expecting her and there were songs to practice over. She seated herself on a stone close by, and smoothed her soft pretty dress with her hand, and put out one dainty foot and turned it a little so that Jean might observe the perfect fit of her boot.

She chatted on pleasantly about her trip and

the things she had seen, and the pleasure she had had, and her listener exhibited a becoming amount of interest, and asked questions in the right places. Filled with herself, Maud talked with fluency, and, with the sound of her own voice, her self-satisfaction increased, and the idea that a man in his senses could fail to prefer *her* to the pale, quiet little creature opposite, appeared reduced to an absurdity.

Still it was well that Jean should know. Jean was not used to lovers, and even to have a man talk science with her might be fatal to her peace. Jean must not be allowed to exalt herself under a misapprehension. To let her do so, would be unchristian. The vindictive feeling that was in her assumed the mask of kindness, and so got itself recognized and brought to the front. Maud felt a glow permeate her being as though righteousness and peace had kissed each other.

Then she said, "I find it dull at home of course, or would if it were not for Theodore—Dr. Ravenel, you know," with an explanatory inflection in her voice. "He fills up the gaps, I tell him; and to do him justice, he is more devoted than ever. I suppose he fears that I may be lonesome, or regret things. Being engaged to a man usually spoils him as a lover: he gets so sure of one. But it hasn't spoiled Theodore. He is more solicitous to please me than ever, and I'm *sure that his only desire in life is for my happi-*

ness. If I did not think so, I should never have consented to marry him."

Maud's tone was matter-of-fact, as was her nature; there should be no possibility of mistake. She glanced at Jean from under her lashes, expecting some change of color, some evidence of emotion.

Jean had her hair gathered up in her hands and was re-coiling it. Her head was bent forward so that her face was in shadow; her hands were steady. Maud longed to say something that would disturb her calm, that would cause some display of emotion: she wanted to repeat to her some of the things that the village people said, and to admonish her on the heinousness of her conduct. But there was an aloofness about Jean that held back plain words, and Maud's brain was not quick enough for subtle insinuation. She felt aggrieved, and as though her design had been but half accomplished. She did not know that Jean was fighting for self-control with all the strength that was in her.

"She has no more feeling than a rock," Maud thought resentfully. "Any other girl would have cried, or asked questions, or *something*. She doesn't care for a thing in this world except books, and there isn't a spark of womanhood in her."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

“JEAN! Jean!”

Jean lifted her head and listened.

The dusk had gathered in close and heavy: the mist had thickened, the warm night air still acting as an absorbent. Her dress was damp and clung to her, and her limbs were cramped from having been held in one position. The horse had gone to a distant part of the lot, she could hear him snort and move, and the breaking of the grass as he cropped it was like the tearing of new cloth in her ears. When he ceased for an instant, the silence became a palpable pain, in unison with which her excited senses thrilled and quivered.

“Jean! Jean!”

The voice seemed in the air, in the mist, an echo out of the infinite. In her abnormally tense condition, Jean could not define it or her own emotions—could not realize that the whisper was only an echo within her own soul. She took the sound to be extraneous, and her thought *moving* along the line of least resistance, returned to *Maud*. Then she remembered that hours—or

had it been years?—before, she had touched Maud's hand with hers, and had watched her walk away homeward; there had been a gleam of sunlight on Maud's pathway, she remembered, and behind her the poplar tree had cast a long dark shadow.

The strange, mysterious whisper haunted her—rung in her ears, beat on her brain, with insistent repetition of her name. She rose slowly and went toward the house.

On the porch, her mammy met her, troubled and anxious, and drew her in and toward the stairway.

“Did you call me, mammy? Just before I came in? More than once?”

Her foot was on the lower step, and she half turned to look over her shoulder. Her nature had been stirred, but her habit of mind forced her to seek a natural explanation of whatever happened. She could have sworn that the voice had not been that of her nurse, yet she half hoped for, half resented the possibility that it might have been.

“No'm, I didn't. I've been huntin' fur you tho', Miss Jean—huntin' all over de house. When I couldn't find you nowhar I was startin' out arter Ben to sen' to de village arter you. I war 'feard you'd gone home wid Miss Maud. I've been wantin' you, Miss Jean—wantin' you bad. De chile—she's mighty low, she's been tooken wuss'n I ever see'd her. I'se 'feard de end is nigh.

It don't look to me like she *kin* git over dis bout. 'Tain't in nater fur er human to hold out no longer. She's 'bleeged to go."

Jean gave a low quick cry.

"When did the attack come on? She seemed as usual before I went out. How long has it lasted? What have you done?"

She almost raced up the stairs as she put the hurried questions. The old woman had much ado to keep up with her as she answered :

"I done every thing—same ez common. But it don't do no good. She wouldn't eat no wittles an' she kep' on makin' dat moanin' fuss, like she allus does when de attack is risin'. I didn't call you kase you had comp'ny, an' was wore out anyhow, an' I didn't think 'twas gwine be no wuss'n common. I never got skeer'd t'well I foun' I couldn't do nothin' wid her, an' dat de physic wasn't no mor'n dat much water to her."

They were crossing the outer room, the inner door was open, the curtain pulled aside and the piteous moaning sound was indistinct and fitful. Jean went straight through to the bed, which stood in a recess, and bent over it. Her face was white and her hands trembled as she slipped them under the bedclothes. In a moment she raised her head.

"Send for Dr. Ravenel at once," she said. "Some one must share the responsibility."

As mammy left the room, she called : " Mammy,

I want Clive Winthrope. Tell Ben to bring him quickly. I need him."

Then she busied herself doing the things which she knew to be useless.

The two men met at the yard gate, for each had obeyed the summons as speedily as possible. The messenger, in his haste, had been worse than incoherent, and, as they shook hands, Winthrope questioned anxiously:

"What's the matter? Who is ill? Is it Jean?"

"I don't know," Ravenel answered. "I think not. God forbid that it should be! The negro said something about a child; but I didn't stay to question him."

Winthrope drew in his breath, and gave it forth again in a long sigh of relief. As they entered the house, he said, "Come this way," and led the way up-stairs.

The passage and the room they entered first, were dark, so that, by contrast, the inner room looked brilliant. It photographed itself on Ravenel's brain and suggested a similar room he had once seen in a French institution for dumb idiots. There was in it every thing that could attract and please the sense of sight, every thing that could minister to material comfort. To find such a room in a quiet country house was a surprise, almost a shock to him. He glanced at Winthrope, but the latter's face was simply grave and anxious. He was evidently familiar with the room.

Jean was beside the bed, and she gave place to Ravenel at once, glancing up at him with a wistful expression in her eyes, although she knew so well what the verdict must be. As he bent over the bed and laid his hand upon the covering, she made a movement as though she would stop him, and a low moan escaped her. Winthrope took her hand in his and drew her away.

At first, Ravenel could only see a mass of golden hair, soft and beautiful as a child's, that covered the pillow and rested on the sheet; he moved it away and bent lower, and turned the bedclothes down, and a great throb of pity pulsed through him and brought to his face the true physician's look, the look of tender, yearning comprehension. The creature was small, not larger than a child of eight, and so terribly unlike humanity in form and feature that the human pleading of its dumb, dying eyes was rendered doubly pitiful.

Ravenel made the slight necessary examination as speedily as he could, and straightened the sheet and moved the beautiful hair so as to form a shelter with it. His eyes met Winthrope's as he did so, and by a gesture and quick change of expression, he conveyed the information that the end was close at hand, and that Jean should be shielded from knowledge of it.

He stood quietly, his finger on the pulse, his head bent to listen to the breathing. Something

pressed against him and he glanced down. It was the old colored woman, on her knees with her face against the pillow; her trembling dark hand lay beside the misshapen head, and touched and stroked the golden hair. She was praying, and he caught a sentence or two, broken and disjointed by her sobs.

"Lord, don't jedge her none! Take her to yo' bosom like er' po' little bird whar's drapped out'n de nes' an' got trod on an' crippled. Lord, *you* know how 'twas wid 'em all! De doctor war wor'd plumb out an' forgot to take notice, an' Miss Sadie war too far gone to keer. 'Twarn't de baby's fault, Lord! 'twas put 'pon her befo' she come here. Take her right up frum whar she is, an' make her straight an' sensible, an' human, like t'other folks. Jesus, I took her right into dese arms when she come, an' I've hilt her in 'em ever sence, an' I *can't* 'gree to let her go 'cepten' I kin put her right in your'n. She can't do nuthin' fur—" the sobs came thick and fast and choked her. A hand pushed Ravenel aside, and Jean knelt down beside her nurse and drew her dying sister into her arms.

Ravenel drew back beside Clive Winthrope. He had not spoken to Jean, but every fiber of him had been conscious of her presence from the first. His heart ached for her, for the strangeness, the forlornness of her position. No woman near her save her colored nurse, only himself and Win-

throe—two men, and that terrible thing under the bedclothes. Compassion for her rose and drowned all thought of self: her loneliness formed a wall to shield her from thoughts of selfish love. He only yearned to help her somehow, to comfort her somehow. .

After a moment mammy rose and took the child from Jean's arms and laid her down upon the pillow. Winthrope slipped his hand through Ravenel's arm and drew him into the outer room and let the curtain fall over the door.

Then the men consulted together earnestly, each intent on the same object, and that, to spare Jean and care for her in every possible way. Ravenel suggested, even insisted, that some lady—Mrs. Tinsley or Miss Elsworth—should be sent for. Jean ought not to be alone, he said, and pressed the point. Winthrope shook his head and put the suggestion aside.

"There are things that must be attended to first," he said. "That's why Jean sent for me. The doctor knew that this must come, and he left me full instructions. He was morbidly sensitive about this thing, morbidly afraid of curiosity or talk. Jean is simply a reproduction of her father; both must be humored in the matter. Every thing must be done by *us*, even to the screwing down of the coffin lid, *before* the people are notified. It is a strange thing to do, but it must be done. I *have* given my word, and your concurrence and

Tinsley's will make it right with the world. I am going for Tinsley now."

On the way down stairs the professional instinct made Ravenel put a question.

"What was the cause of it?" Then he added quickly, "Don't tell if you think *they* would prefer that you should not," using the plural involuntarily.

Winthrope paused, then replied slowly, "There is no reason why you shouldn't know. A great many more people *do* know than Monteith ever realized. He blamed himself so bitterly—so unreasonably, I think, that he was beyond all judgment in the matter, and could only *feel*, and that morbidly, about it. He had, what few men are troubled with, an acute sense of the responsibility of paternity. Mrs. Monteith was afflicted with some nervous disease, and had contracted the opium habit. It had taken hold of her before Monteith realized it, and he couldn't break it up. He watched her night and day before Jean was born, and so averted any worse consequences than making Jean his double. This child came the last year of the war, when Monteith had charge of the hospitals, and could only be at home occasionally. His wife got a terrible fright one day while she was under the influence of the drug, and this was the result. She was a woman of powerful imagination, and strong emotional nature, even when in a normal condition. Poor

soul! It was a sad case all around, and she suffered herself almost as much as she caused others to suffer. She had lovable traits, in spite of her pitiful weakness. My wife was very fond of her."

"And Miss Monteith has borne this burden alone all these months? That was hard—cruel on a girl like her." Ravenel spoke resentfully, as though he were imputing blame to the dead man.

Winthrop looked at him. "It couldn't be helped," he said, "There was no one but Jean to assume the charge. The idea of an asylum was intolerable to them. They feared the poor child might be neglected. Jean has had the care of her ever since she was born—in a measure. It's no new thing with Jean. The child is her own flesh and blood too—her own sister. She had a claim on Jean's tenderness. You forget the tie between them."

Ravenel felt rebuked, and the loyalty of his nature bent in homage to the loyalty of Jean's.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE village was more exercised over Jean Monteith than ever. Most of them had known, in a nebulous way, of the existence of the child; but, except the negro woman who assisted mammy, no one had ever seen her: the rules of the house had been strict and closely observed. The more sanguine and morbidly curious among the gossips had trusted to time for developments, and now time for the poor creature had come to an end, and there had been no developments save a sealed coffin, and a quiet burial in the village graveyard.

"I wonder Jean could bear to be alone at such a time!" exclaimed Mrs. Tinsley, with the pique natural to a person who yearns to be the director of every happening. "But there!—I give her up! She is utterly unlike other people and utterly incorrigible."

She spread her hands abroad with the palms upward, to demonstrate how entirely she freed them of Jean and her concerns.

"Some people dislike to put their skeletons

on exhibition," suggested Mr. Tinsley pacifically. "It isn't usual I grant, but with some the feeling lingers. The Monteiths are a sensitive race. It's in the blood. They shrink from a touch like mimosa leaves."

"I believe they are half crazy—that's what I believe. Don't tell *me* that it's natural or normal for a girl to shut herself up with an idiot for months and months and never crave sympathy, or some one to share the burden, or other women to be with her. *It's not* natural, and I wouldn't believe it was, though one rose from the dead to tell me so."

There was considerable edge to Mrs. Tinsley's voice, and she tapped her foot against the carpet. She was hurt as well as mortified, that she should not have been sent for. She was a kind-hearted woman under all her love of importance.

"How do you know that Jean hasn't craved every one of the things you mentioned?" questioned her husband. "It's my belief that she has—not actively perhaps, but in a dumb, aching undercurrent. I said something about it to Winthrop one day, and he said Jean was bound by a promise. She is the pluckiest soul I have ever known, and there is no possibility of half-measures in her."

"Do you suppose she'll go on living out there with only her mammy? I should think she'd be *afraid*."

It was Maud who spoke.

"Winthrope says not. Her mammy is like a mother to her, and is, I suppose, Jean's principal vent for emotion. Still the conventionalities demand something, and there is no longer any reason why they should not be consulted."

Mrs. Tinsley looked up from her knitting. The subject had interest despite her wholesale repudiation of it.

"Who will she get?" she inquired. "Parma Wright was speaking about it to me this very morning."

"If she values her peace of mind, she won't speak about it to Winthrope," the minister answered with a laugh. "He'd tar and feather Parma if he could. I never saw a man detest a woman with more *abandon*. He's been souring on her hands for some time, but she hadn't sense enough to see it. The morning after he got back from Virginia, she undertook to insinuate something against Jean. I don't know what she said—Winthrope wouldn't repeat, but it was the final straw. Her sex saved her from a square knock-down, but I inferred from his manner that it hadn't saved her from considerable verbal unpleasantness. Jean has invited Maria Elsworth to take charge of her. Winthrope told me so just now; he was on his way to her rooms, with Jean's letter in his pocket. It will be a very suitable arrangement. Miss Elsworth is poor and it will

be a help to her, and she's a sweet-tempered woman, and sympathetic enough not to wear on Jean."

"Did Jean consult any one, or manage the affair herself, as usual."

It was hard on her to find that time had brought about her own arrangement for Jean, and that she had been debarred from any active participation. Her husband understood her feelings and was sorry for her; his tone, when he answered her, was gentle in spite of its undercurrent of reproof.

"Don't feel hurt about it, Margaret. Jean has acted for the best, according to her understanding of it, all through. She is terribly unnerved and broken down, and agreed to every thing that we proposed. Winthrope and I talked the matter over yesterday, after the funeral, and to get Miss Elsworth seemed the proper thing to do. She was devoted to the doctor, and she'll be good to Jean for his sake."

As Mr. Tinsley said, Jean had assented to their arrangements for her at once. The subject had been mooted to her, considerately and gently, with careful avoidance of aught that could suggest cognizance of the fact that she had been made the subject of gossip. Jean was very docile; whatever they thought best, she said: there was no reason now against it. She wrote a letter to Miss Elsworth, asking her very sweetly

if she would consent to leave her home and come and take care of a lonely girl; it would be a great kindness. Tears came into Miss Elsworth's eyes when she read it, and a thought into her mind which she put into words the very next time she saw Miss Parma.

"That poor child has had a hard time, since her father died. She has had a big burden to carry all alone, and she's carried it faithfully. It has been unkind and mean in people to talk about her as they have done. Thank goodness, *I* never did! Dr. Monteith was like a brother to me when I was in trouble. It has made me downright angry that people should gossip about Jean."

"You shook your head over her just as much as any body, whether you talked or not," snapped Miss Parma; "and I noticed you always listened to what others had to say. She's just a little snake in the grass, that Jean Monteith! Look at the way she wheedles all the men! Clive Winthrope and Dr. Ravenel are both stark idiots about her, and even the minister, who *ought* to have some sense, gets rid of it all the instant Jean's name is mentioned. If this were a mediæval age, or I believed in witchcraft, I'd say that that little pale-faced thing was a sorceress."

Miss Elsworth opened her eyes.

"You said some time ago that Dr. Ravenel was engaged—or as good as engaged—to Maud Tinsley," she objected.

"I don't care what I said some time ago—some time ago isn't *now*. How tedious you are, Maria! As if there was *ever* any counting on the stability of men's affections. They overheat and cool off like an ill-regulated stove. Dr. Ravenel may be engaged to Maud, or he may not; but one thing I'd take my oath to—he's breaking his heart this minute about Jean Monteith."

"And Jean—?"

The old lady's voice quivered, and her fingers toyed nervously with the ring on her thin left hand.

Miss Parma's temper rose. "Don't ask *me* any thing about Jean," she said, acrimoniously. "Nobody can tell any thing about her. She's as still as a mole. She *looks* as faded and forlorn as a last year's gown, though, if that's any sign. But with Jean, even that may simply mean physical prostration. If you should ask her, I suppose she would say that she needed a tonic."

Unkindly as Miss Parma made the statement, it was nevertheless a fact that the sap seemed somehow to be drying up in Jean. With the completion of her self-appointed task, all energy appeared to leave her. Her face grew whiter and smaller day by day, circles began to deepen under her eyes, and vitality seemed to be ebbing. The strain of the past months was telling upon her, and a troublesome cough developed from a cold *taken* from lying on the ground in the mist and

damp the evening that the child had died. She made no complaint, nor would she go to bed, or consent to be treated as an invalid. When mammy or Miss Elsworth would worry about her, she would smile and bid them be at rest, for she was only tired.

"The child is wasting away," Miss Elsworth said. "Something should be done at once. I think Dr. Ravenel ought to see her."

It was Winthrope to whom the remark was made, and it startled him. "Was she so ill as that?" he asked. "She said that she was only tired."

He went to Jean and proposed that she should see the doctor; just to satisfy her friends; it would be more prudent; it troubled him to hear her cough. But Jean would not hear of it. She did not need a doctor, she maintained. There was nothing much the matter with her; she did not want Dr. Ravenel.

Winthrope pressed the point.

"You have no right to tamper with your health," he said, "or to make us all uneasy. If you won't see Ravenel because you ought, or to please me, I shall take the matter in my own hands and insist upon your seeing him. Your father placed you in my care, and I will not allow your health to be neglected. I shall send for Ravenel at once."

A look akin to terror flitted across Jean's face:

her breath came quickly, and she put two pleading hands on his arm.

"Please don't do that," she entreated; "I'll see a doctor, I will indeed—but not Dr. Ravenel. Send for the man at Winston. He is skillful and highly spoken of. I would rather have a stranger."

Winthrope looked surprised. "What has Ravenel done?" he demanded. "I thought that you and he were friends."

"So we are," Jean assented hurriedly. "It isn't that. I don't know—I can't say—I mean I *won't* have Dr. Ravenel—that's all! You ought not to tease me so, Clive. If I am ill I ought to be humored, and I'll see the Winston doctor or nobody."

Her tone was irritable, unlike her usual gentle voice; her manner was constrained: she folded and unfolded her hands nervously. She was so unlike herself altogether that Winthrope could not help being struck with it. She must be seriously ill, he thought, and he determined to send to Winston that same evening. He could not understand her aversion to seeing Ravenel; it seemed irrational. Still he supposed it to be an invalid's fancy.

"I'm afraid Ravenel's feelings will be hurt," he observed, as he took his leave. "He won't understand your sending for the other man. He *will think* that he has offended you."

Jean's lips quivered: she unclosed them as if to speak, then changed her mind and turned away her head.

Winthrope could not understand her at all, and went away feeling baffled. Jean was usually so tender of people's feelings, so thoughtful and considerate. There was something strange about Jean.

CHAPTER XX.

THE Winston doctor came and went, and came and went again, with no appreciable change in Jean's condition. He talked about the system lacking tone, and of excessive mental and physical exertion having resulted in prostration. It was the reaction from the overstrain, he said, there was no organic disease that he could discover, although there might be hereditary tendencies, for the development of which the present low condition would be favorable. Then he questioned Winthrop closely about Jean's parents—what her mother had died of—and her father. When he had heard some of the circumstances—told guardedly, and with some reservations, he shook his head and looked serious, particularly when he found that the doctor had died of an overstrain. That complicated the case, he said, for the tendencies which produced certain conditions could be, and were, transmitted. Then he fell to deploring excess of nervous energy.

"That's the misery of high-strung organisms," he averred, "there's never any safety for them. The mind treats the body like an unwilling horse

and drives it mercilessly. They do the best of the world's work; but they do it at a terrible expense. Sooner or later the overtaxed organs become incapable of performing their functions, and then the length or shortness of the time which brings the end, is simply determined by the reserve of force Nature may have in each individual case. High-strung people rarely reach the maximum distance; they let off too much steam along the line."

"You don't apprehend danger in this case! There is none of—of—a fatal termination, I mean," Winthrop's voice shook; then he added, passionately, "There is *none*, I tell you! She must not die—*she shall not die!* What's knowledge or skill worth if they can't hold death at bay? God! how futile and helpless you make men seem!"

The doctor glanced up shrewdly. "I understand," he said. "Don't work yourself into a frenzy. Miss Monteith is in a pretty low state; but the case isn't, by any means, hopeless. As for futility—it isn't *I* that make it apparent; Nature herself would be futile if she should run against a law. Make allowance for limitations; we haven't got at the Tree of Life yet. Nature doesn't *change* any thing—she only modifies and readjusts, and knowledge and skill, following humbly in her footsteps, can do as much. You can make some readjustments here, I think, and

help the case immensely. The young lady has something on her mind."

Winthrope looked attentive.

"What makes you think so?" he demanded.

"I don't think so at all, I *know* it. I'm not doing her any good. I'd just as well be pouring drugs into the hollow of a stump. Even air and nourishment and exercise don't reach the root in this case. The trouble here is mental. Find out what it is, and ease the mind of its load, and the body will respond fast enough. Has any thing she's particularly interested in gone wrong—or any body? Is she in suspense of any sort?"

Winthrope nodded. "She's been working within an inch of her life, for months past, over some manuscript of her father's," he admitted. "The doctor left an exhaustive treatise on Nervous Diseases, and a fair copy had to be made for the publishers. Jean has been making it."

"And exhausting herself into a nervous disease on her own account, eh? That's sensible and rational. Work of that sort is a fine thing for an imaginative woman—makes her brain healthy and natural, and discourages abnormal growth of fancies. I wonder she isn't in her grave. Where's the book now?"

"I have it," replied Winthrope, "or rather I've submitted it to a fellow at the North—a professor at one of the colleges. Jean is horribly nervous *about* the thing—afraid that she may have

omitted something of importance, or made blunders in the copying."

The doctor pursed up his lips, as he drew on his gloves. He was a prejudiced man, and had no belief in the power of creatures feminine to endure intellectual effort. "Too much nerve tissue, and too general a tendency to excess of waste over repair," he would say. "They always give out somewhere, usually the body gets sickly. There is no regulating them; too many things have to be allowed for." When proof to the contrary would be adduced, he would wave it to a place among the exceptions, and doggedly maintain that the rule was with him.

"Get the book off her mind, then, and as speedily as possible. Whatever Dr. Monteith's theories may be, to have his daughter die of them, can hardly be the illustration he had in mind. The tonics, and all that, must go on of course, but in this case, I suspect, you will be the physician, not *I*."

And then he took his leave.

Winthrope was not satisfied. He knew that Jean was anxious about the book, but it did not seem to him a matter of sufficient importance to account for her present state.

Jean had brought him the manuscript with the request that he would submit it to the final test of examination by a scientist of repute, before negotiations with a publisher should be set on

foot. Her old doubts had returned with added force. She wished the work to stand by its own merit, she said, and so suppressed the name; for Dr. Monteith had been well and favorably known in the medical world. The examination must be crucial.

"How beautifully you have copied it," Winthrop said, turning the pages with admiration. "My poor child, how hard you must have worked! You should have let me help you."

Jean winced, she knew not wherefore.

"You could not help me," she answered, turning her face away. "I would have come to you had it been possible. I was *obliged* to do it myself."

Winthrop had taken the manuscript and sent it North, to a learned professor, who happened to be a friend of his own, with the request for an unvarnished opinion of its value. That Jean should be interested and anxious over the result appeared to him natural and comprehensible, but not that she should have almost fretted herself into a decline over it. Of her connection with the book in any capacity, save as a copyist, he was, of course, ignorant, and therefore its importance as a factor in bringing about the present condition of affairs was beyond his grasp. He set it aside, with a bare recognition of the fact that she had stooped over her desk too closely, and cast about for another cause.

The influence of the mental state of a thinker directs, in a measure, his thoughts of others, and the dominance of any emotion leads to recognition of kindred emotion. Winthrop being in love with Jean began to watch her, seeking for evidence of a state of feeling that should match his own. The habit of his mind, when aroused, was analytical, and his professional training had made him keen to penetrate into the arcana of feeling and motive. Jean's intellectual grasp, he perceived, was as strong as ever; it was only her hold on life that had seemed to loosen. His love sharpened his observation, and he noticed many things which ordinarily would have escaped him.

Gradually it came to him that the change in Jean was fundamental; that something had come into her life that he must learn to understand. Gradually it came to him that the change in her was apart from himself, that other influences, stronger than any *he* could ever hope to wield, had been at work; that *his* position with her was precisely that which it had always been—her friend, her father's friend, the man she trusted and relied on.

The discovery brought him pain, and a shrinking in every fiber, and a sense of something held by the future that would be bitter to him. He had never told her that he loved her, and, as he watched her, the feeling grew that he would never tell her—that the dream he had indulged of mak-

ing her his wife, was but a dream and that he must arouse himself and put it aside, and face realities. It was hard on him, and at first he had a strange feeling as though a weight were on his chest and gradually increasing and crushing out his life. The dream had been so fair, had seemed so true.

To himself, he was a young man still—young in thought, young in action. Could it be that to Jean he was old? His blood coursed hotly through his veins, his sympathies were keen, his emotions were intense. Could it be that to Jean he had seemed to belong to another generation? The idea held him: once, under its influence, he went to the mirror and examined his own face, trying to divest himself of personality and to look at it with Jean's eyes; curiously he regarded it, as a thing apart; curiously he noted the ravages which time had made, the gray in his beard and hair, the fine lines about his eyes. The humor of the situation struck him—and its pathos. He smiled, but there was an ache at his heart. To himself, he was of the present, and to Jean—of the past! He had hoped to bring sunshine to her life by his love, but that could never be, and his love must be true enough, and noble enough to stand aside—nay, more, to break a way for sunshine to reach her from another quarter.

Then stories he had heard since his return from *Virginia*, vague rumors and insinuations, which

he had scorned as gossip, recurred to him. What tale was that Miss Parma Wright had sought to pour into his ears, of an intimacy—a “courtship” she had said—between Jean and Dr. Ravenel? At the time of telling, he had been indignant—furious, in fact, and had resented the gossip with caustic words; but it was the fact that there should be gossip, not the subject of it, which had annoyed him. To the report itself he had attached little importance. When he had associated Ravenel, in his mind, with a woman at all, it had always been with Maud Tinsley. He had seen no signs in Ravenel of any special interest in Jean, no intimacy beyond that of ordinary acquaintance. Then too, his horizon had been filled with his own plans concerning Jean.

Now Miss Parma’s story acquired significance; he began to put two and two together: his own absence, covering many weeks; that of the Tinsleys; Ravenel’s changed appearance, his hard, haggard expression, the feverish energy with which he threw himself into his work: Jean’s listlessness, her lack of interest, her unreasonable irritation when Ravenel’s name had been mentioned, all seemed bits of the same puzzle, which when fitted would form the map of a country in which there would be no room, no habitation for him.

He forced himself to look at it, to explore its every possibility; he strove to familiarize himself with it, to increase the pain until the reaction

should produce numbness. He wanted to fight his battle and bury his dead, so that, if the call to enlist in her service should ever come, he might be ready.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE long Indian summer days passed slowly away with warmth and the languor of beauty. The forest threw off its garment, in answer to the challenge of the wind, and stood stripped for the winter conflict. Over nature crept one of those transformations which were inaugurated with the beginning of time, and will continue to be repeated in wonder and perfection until time itself shall end. One season gave place to the next in succession, and it was December again, and the circle of the year was well-nigh complete.

With Jean there was little change apparent; she went about as usual, and attended to her trifling duties, and if she had become paler or weaker or thinner, it had been by such infinitesimal degrees as to be well-nigh imperceptible. Nature, apparently, was holding even in the game with life, waiting to see how the cards would fall.

As the time drew to an end, which she had set herself as a limit, and the reply from the Northern professor might be looked for by any mail, Jean's restlessness increased until it was almost pitiful. She made Winthrop promise to bring the letter

to her instantly, no matter what might be its contents; to hold back nothing, but let her know the worst, if the worst should come.

So nervous was she that Winthrope himself became infected, and when, at last, the manuscript was returned to him accompanied by a bulky letter, his hand shook so that he could scarcely break the seal, and his heart sickened at thought of the effect an unfavorable verdict might have on Jean. After the first sentences, which were unimportant, the lines about his mouth straightened out and his eyes took on a satisfied expression.

"The work is a remarkable one," the professor wrote. "For clearness of insight, thoroughness of knowledge, and power of deduction it has few equals. The range of thought is vast, and the method displayed in its expression is as fine as any thing I ever saw. The second volume, and especially the latter half of it, I consider wonderful; the insight here amounts to genius, or revelation, which is the same thing. The book can not fail to take rank as an authority on the subjects of which it treats."

Then followed an enthusiastic demand that the author should be brought before the curtain, and a strongly-intimated wish for the honor of his personal acquaintance.

Winthrope took the letter at once to Jean, glad *from the bottom* of his heart to have this bit of

sunshine for her. Jean's love for her father, and the tender loyalty with which she strove to keep his memory alive in the minds of men, touched him deeply. He placed the letter in her hand, and stroked her hair and bade her be of good cheer, for the clouds were lifting.

Jean read the letter hurriedly, snatching at its contents as a hungry creature snatches at food, and then more slowly. Then there came a relaxation as though a hand that had held her captive had loosed its grip, and she rested her head on the table and wept for very weariness of relief. Winthrop soothed and coaxed her as though she had been a child, and when she had calmed down again he left her, feeling that she would rather be alone.

An hour passed. Jean rested in her father's arm-chair lost in thought. The manuscript lay beside her on the table, and the professor's letter was in her lap. The room was quiet. Mammy had made a noble fire, and the oak and hickory logs burned and glowed and made pyrotechnic displays in the black throat of the chimney. Outside, the shadows lengthened and the afternoon waned toward evening. The wind sighed around the corner of the house, not boisterously, like that other evening long ago, but sadly, as though, its passion spent, it had strength for naught but sighing.

Jean's thoughts were busy with the past. One

by one she summoned the ghosts of dead events to appear and pass in procession before her: the night whereon the shadow which rested on her father's life had first enveloped her; when cowering, forgotten and frightened in her little bed, she had listened to her mother's wild remorse and self-upbraiding, her father's patient tenderness. She had not understood it then, but had felt, child though she was, that in the room was something terrible—and something grand! It had been the first revelation of human infirmity, the first recognition of perfect love. Then the years of slow absorption into her father's life, the growth of insight into his nature, of comprehension how to aid him; the years during which she had put herself not only into his arms as his comforter, but shoulder to shoulder with him as his faithful comrade. Then the partial release of her mother's death, and the realization that the fall of the curtain could bring heart-felt relief, and the pity that it should be so. Then the peace of the quiet interval during which they had been all the world to each other, and so on to the evening one short year before when they had sat together in the still firelight and she had promised to be faithful to his work.

Jean's hand closed on the letter in her lap, and her eyes shone tenderly. She had cared for all: the child was safe from possibility of neglect or *ill-treatment*, the only forms of evil she could ever

have known ; she had been tended with reverent recognition of the sacredness of unmerited misfortunes. Presently Jean drew the manuscript toward her and removed the wrappers from it. She wanted to see it again, to feel the pages with her hands, and to go over the words and sentences. She bent her head and kissed it—once, twice, as though it were dear to her. Her heart was full, and her fingers trembled. She turned to the second volume ; her interest focused here, although she would have spurned the suggestion of any selfish influence. What was it that the letter said?—"In the second volume, and especially its latter half, the insight amounts to genius—or revelation." That was well. Her father would not be shamed before the world. His name would be honored among men.

She turned the leaves, reading a sentence here and there. Like an atmosphere, the old influence, her father's influence surrounded her. Soon she became conscious of another influence which crossed the first and mingled with it, and, at first, produced a sense of discord and then of increased strength ; the sentences took on an aspect that was strange and yet familiar. Upon the page, Ravenel's face shaped itself and gazed up at her ; the words she read quickened into life and repeated themselves in her brain with the inflections of of Ravenel's voice.

What had happened?—what was happening?

Jean shook from head to foot: her eyes had a hunted look; her breath came quick, and she passed her hand over the page as though to wipe off something. It was not true! The work was hers—was her father's! This other had nothing to do with it!

The lower logs had burned through, sinking down between the andirons into a red-hot mass; the flames leaped up with a roar and caught the logs above. A great volume of smoke poured up the chimney and out into the night. The wind had died away: everywhere there was silence.

Jean's face grew pallid as marble, the strange look in her eyes deepened. Struggling to life within her, was a consciousness of that which she had done. Then temptation, reaching forward, stooped and laid hands on the new-born thing, Who would know? What did it matter where the sheaves had been gleaned—or how? The harvest was hers, should be her father's. It was the same!—*she* was his: even the name was hers only through being his—the name she was seeking to——

As the word "honor" formulated in her brain, all that was noble in her rose as though summoned by the wand of a magician. What was this she would do? Her duty to her father?—ay, she owed him duty—the duty of protection from *herself*. From her lips came a shuddering cry and she put up her hands to shut out sight.

To her overstrained imagination, the dead man's influence shaped itself into a visible presence: his noble face, his patient hands took tangible shape and held her back. Her love should not be made the vehicle by which dishonor should be put on him, nor his name the cloak for a lie.

Then, like lightning, came the thought of Ravenel. Jean cowered in her chair: her bosom rose and fell hurriedly, her breath came in sobs. Suddenly, strangely, like the parting of a curtain that had shut her in, like the sight of dawn from the summit of a mountain, came the knowledge that she loved this man. Her soul was awed, was bewildered, she could not understand, at first, that which had happened to her. She had never talked or dreamed of love or lovers, like other girls. She had lived so much apart, had been so absorbed in one thought, so surrounded by one set of influences. She could not comprehend it—this wonderful thing which had happened. She put out her hand and touched the table, her dress, the chair in which she was sitting: she raised her head and gazed around the familiar room. What made it all seem changed? Why was it all so vague, so shadowy? Her old life seemed slipping away from her—the old interests, the old emotions faded, for the time, and vanished like dreams, leaving her alone, as it were, with Ravenel in a strange new world, permeated with a *strange new atmosphere*. When had it come—

this force at work within her—and how? Her thought worked backward, striving to trace a course, to discover a beginning. She could not: she was not used to think of love; to gauge its properties, or analyze its development: a shyness oppressed her; a wave of crimson passed over the pallor of her cheek.

She remembered the torpor of pain in which she had lived for the last few weeks, the dumb aching which had its beginning on the evening when the child had died—yonder beneath the poplar tree. She had not comprehended its meaning; a part of her nature had been undeveloped—was now enduring its natal throes. Even yet she felt no desire for possession, no jealousy of Maud, no anxiety as to whether her love might be returned. This knowledge, her own emotions—so new and overwhelming, occupied her to the exclusion of all else. Presently, when she should grow used to it, there would be room for more complexity of feeling.

Time passed: the shadows deepened; the fire had burned low, with a great bed of coals which radiated heat and filled the room with comfort. The light from it flickered on the walls and ceiling, and played fitfully over the table with its mass of books and papers.

Jean's eyes, soft with the tenderness that had come to them, fell on the manuscript and their expression changed; she bent forward and read

a sentence over, then a page. Yes; that was Ravenel's—she knew it now, his mode of thought, his turn of expression; it was as though Ravenel's hand had guided the pen which her's held. She read further—all Ravenel's to the end; little of herself, less of her father. She admitted it at last, and with the admission, her vision cleared, and her love showed her the nature of her sin. She had robbed him—this man whom she loved—had wooed him to her, lulled him into security and then filched from him the result of his labor and experience. Jean writhed under the lash of her own scorn. Was this the end of it all—her strength, her faithfulness?—*this*—theft, and a lie?

How had she been so deceived? What had blinded her eyes, and obscured her perception? What twist in her nature had occasioned this obliquity of purpose? Her mind worked heavily and her head sank forward on her folded arms. How inconsequent had been her efforts! How she had gone round and round through devious by-paths to reach the goal to which her father had pointed the open highway. She had striven to wrest Nature, and Nature had avenged herself: she had set herself in the path of events and she had been beaten down and over-ridden.

Her old life lay in ruins, amid which she cowered, filled with shrinking terror of herself, with distrust of the future, and of her own power of guidance. A wild yearning for Ravenel awoke

in her breast : he was strong and true ; he would tell her how this thing should end. She would go to him—he would understand and help her—he had been tender with the child—that evening on the mountain—the storm—she would go to him ; he would forgive her the wrong she had done : would show her how to set the matter straight.

Her brain was obscured ; her thoughts had become vague and uncertain ; the dominant impulse was a desire for assistance, the dominant emotion a longing for Ravenel. Her hands went out with an appealing gesture, like that of a terrified child. Slowly she rose and gathered her shawl about her. Her face was pinched, and there was a blue look about her mouth ; she staggered as she walked, and her hands shook so that she could scarcely unfasten the window.

Night had come on clear and crisp ; there was a cool wind blowing, and the moon was at its full. The air revived Jean, and steadied her nerves a little ; her mind was still bewildered, and she followed her impulse blindly. Down the long walk, under the magnolias and live-oaks she went : through the gate, and along the road which led to Melrose—to Ravenel.

The road was bare of trees most of the way, and the moonlight was clear and strong : objects were distinctly visible for a long distance. A

man, coming from the direction of Melrose, caught sight of Jean sometime before he came up with her. It was Danvers, going home to the mountain. He wondered to see a woman abroad at that hour, and his wonder deepened to alarm when he got near enough to see that it was Jean. He spoke to her, inquiring if any thing was wrong — if he could help her in any way? Jean looked at him with wide open eyes, in which was no comprehension of his meaning: she did not answer, but tried to pass him. Danvers placed himself in her path; something was wrong, he could see that plainly, and also that she was in no condition to take care of herself. He bent down and looked at her keenly, taking her gently by the shoulders and turning her so that the moonlight should fall on her face. Jean moaned impatiently, but she submitted to his stronger will: her face was pale as ashes, her hands were cold, and she shivered from head to foot. Danvers shook his head, and glanced up and down the road to see if there were help within call.

The road stretched away silent and deserted, there was nothing astir but the wind. Danvers lifted Jean in his arms as tenderly as though she had been one of his own little ones, and bore her back to the house.

When he had given her into her mammy's hands, with a caution against speaking of what had hap-

pened, "bekase thar war folks whar had a spite agin her an' might talk," Danvers set his face again in the direction of the village, and went straight for Dr. Ravenel.

CHAPTER XXII.

JEAN was asleep when Ravenel reached the house and he would not let her be disturbed. He stood beside her bed a moment, and touched her wrist, her forehead. The pallor of her face, and the lines of pain about her mouth made his heart ache. It had been weeks since he had seen her, and the change which suffering had wrought was very apparent. He spoke a word or two to Miss Elsworth, who was in the room, and left some directions with mammy. Then he took his leave saying that he would come again, as early as might be, the next day.

In the morning he returned, and was shown into the library. Jean was better, mammy said, she would tell her that Dr. Ravenel had come. Winthrope was in the library, and as Ravenel entered he rose, and the two men shook hands. Across Ravenel's mind flitted a feeling of impatience, of resentment that the other man should be there, domiciled, as it were, familiarly in Jean's home; then he remembered that Winthrope was her guardian.

The men stood on the hearth-rug side by side.

and gradually there came to them a feeling of expectancy, as sense of something impending—of words to be spoken, perhaps, or things done. Winthrope was quiet and serious; his way was plain before him, and he could see to the end. Ravenel's hands moved restlessly; his manner was always a little nervous; it was the strain of Gallic blood in him.

Winthrope broke the silence. "Sit down," he said, and pointed towards a chair. "I want to talk to you," and he seated himself on the opposite side of the hearth.

The words would not come. He had set himself a hard task, a cruel task—to speak to another man of the woman he loved as though his interest in her were only that of a friend; to probe another man's heart in regard to the woman who was more to *him* than all the world beside, and if he should find love there to foster it. He shrank and quivered as a man does when the knife enters his flesh; he panted for release from his self-imposed task, as the quarry, hard-pressed, pants for release from the hounds. Why should he speak? Why could he not go his way, leaving the solution of the problem to time, and the sequence of events? What was Ravenel to him, that he should seek to secure his happiness?

Then love rebuked him for selfishness; showed *him that* he had no right to consult his own feelings, no right to stand aside; that, while Rave-

nel's happiness might be nothing to him, Jean's was a great deal, and that the two were synonymous. For Jean he would stand and have his heart drained drop by drop.

Ravenel moved in his chair, and glanced at his watch.

"Have you any thing to do?" Winthrope asked. "Is there any case pressing you?"

"No," the other answered, "nothing special. There is a child sick in the village, but it isn't serious;" then he added, glancing across at Winthrope, "You wished to speak to me."

"Yes." Winthrope paused, then plunged into the matter desperately. "See here, Ravenel, I want to talk to you about Jean. I'm her guardian, you know. I stand in the place of her father. She is singularly alone—pitifully so. There is no one to take any care or responsibility about her except me. I'm worried about her."

"Her health, you mean?" Ravenel put the question slowly.

"More than that. There is something on her mind—something that is reacting on her body—a trouble of some sort. I've seen it for a long time, and that fellow from Winston—the doctor I sent for, because Jean refused to see you—said the same thing. Drugs would be well-nigh powerless to effect a cure, he said, until her mind should be at rest. He told me to find out what weighed on her and remove it, and that the body

would respond at once. I have watched her closely for weeks, and I find—I think—”

He paused. Ravenel's eyes were on him, searching, insistent. He resolutely pulled himself together and went on.

“A man has no right to pry into the sanctuary of a woman's heart and disclose the things he finds, or thinks he finds there. It isn't manly, or generous, or fair to the woman. *Can't* you understand, man!—without my putting it into words! Can't you *feel* what I'm trying to say, but can not?”

“You think Jean cares—” Ravenel's voice broke.

“Yes.”

Ravenel's head dropped forward on his breast, his hand went up to shade his eyes. In one blinding glare the possibility that Jean might love him—nay, the certainty that she *did* love him—flashed over his heart, his soul, his whole being, and illumined the future—and the past. A hundred things crowded back on him, trifles, scarcely noted at the time of happening, but, viewed in the light of this revelation, pregnant with meaning. Jean loved him—his heart beat thick, and his pulses stirred; the blood in his veins coursed rapidly; there awoke in him a longing to look on her, to touch her, to draw her to his breast; fair images thronged to his mind—love, happiness, *peace*, tenderness rose from his heart to his eyes,

his breath came quickly. Then the thought of Maud swept over him like a sirocco, bringing aridity and desolation.

Winthrop rose and crossed the space between them, and laid his hand on Ravenel's shoulder. "How is it with you?" he questioned, huskily. "I am an older man—have suffered. You may trust me."

Ravenel lifted his head. His face was drawn and haggard.

"What is there to say?" he demanded, hoarsely. "I've been a fool, that's all. I've stuffed my purse so full of counters that there is no room for gold. I've bound myself hand and foot with what I took to be a silken thread, and find to be a chain of iron, rusting and corroding and eating into my flesh day by day. What do you look at me like that for? I'm no anomaly. It's nothing unusual for a man to make an infernal, damned fool of himself." His voice was rough and bitter.

Winthrop's hand tightened its hold. "I don't understand. You must speak more definitely," he said.

Ravenel laughed—an arid, mirthless laugh, and rose to his feet, shaking off the other's grasp.

"Look at me," he said. "Do I look happy, joyous, prosperous, as should become a bridegroom-elect? Am I light-hearted?—does it seem to be well with me? A man ought to bear about him some marks of beatitude who is engaged to

the most beautiful woman in the country, and whose sweetheart is, or appears to be, devoted to him. Is that definite enough? Are you satisfied? You understand at last? That's well—but spare me your congratulations—reserve them for the wedding-day, I'll be better able to appreciate them then." His tone changed, his eyes burned, and he brought his hand heavily down on the mantel. "God! how we are let to ruin our lives! How we tangle and twist and knot them till they gall and cut into us on every side!"

He turned toward Winthrope, and caught him by the shoulder. "Man, do you know what it is to be in hell?—for weeks, months!—in hell, I say? Do you want to know what it is like?—the anguish, and the burning and the deathless worm. I can tell you. Bind yourself to a woman—yourself mind, voluntarily, no man compelling you—win her love, her trust, let her learn to look on you as a lover, and then find out that the whole thing has been a mistake; that the affection you feel for her isn't *love*, only a spurious counterfeit, born of opportunity and physical attraction. And find out, too, that there *is* a force in you, a powerful, dominating, omnipresent force, which you know to be *love*, and which has gone out to another woman. Try to master the thing that possesses you, to get your hand on its throat, your knee on its breast, and to hold them there; wrestle and *fight day after day, night after night, and always*

with the consciousness growing in you that the thing gets stronger instead of weaker, and that if your efforts relax for a single instant that it will turn and master *you*. Go to the woman to whom you are bound—and who loves you ; sit beside her, hold her hand in yours, feel her breath on your cheek, on your lips, and try with what strength is in you to hold to your honor, to your duty, when every word, every look, every caress is a torment and a reproach to you.”

He faltered, and caught his breath hard, and then went on, the words pouring from him in a torrent.

“ Then if you want to add fuel to the flames ; to stir the furnace till it crackles and roars, to push agony to the pitch of endurance, find out when it’s too late, that your love—the real passion, not the miserable counterfeit—is returned. That the woman for whom every pulse and fiber of your being cries out, the woman for whom your soul thirsts, as the desert thirsts for rain—find out, I say, that the woman you love, loves you. And know that there is between you a barrier raised by your own folly, your own precipitation.”

“ You love Jean, and you are——”

“ Engaged to another woman,” completed Ravenel shortly ; “ that is about the position of affairs—interesting, I should think—to a looker-on. The cup of water held to a wretch who is

bound—held close, but never allowed to touch his lips. The emotions of the creature might repay investigation. I can fancy them worth analysis—there would be no lack of intensity.”

The lines about the listener’s mouth hardened, his eyes grew stern. “Don’t talk that way,” he said; “it’s not manly. What about Jean? Don’t you suppose that *she* has suffered—is suffering now?”

Ravenel’s face blanched to the lips. “It’s brutal to cut into an open wound,” he muttered.

“Not always. It’s necessary sometimes, as none can know better than yourself. I want to force you to look at this thing all around. You’ve only looked at one side yet. Are you going to marry the woman you are engaged to?”

“I suppose so;” Ravenel’s voice had a dogged, hopeless sound.

“You are not!”

“Why?”

“Because if you do, you’ll be a liar and a scoundrel.”

Ravenel’s eyes blazed, and his hand clenched. “Prove it,” he growled, “or by God, I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

“I will. And I’m going to talk plainly, Ravenel, and call things by their right names. This isn’t a time to mince matters, or to consider any *man’s* feelings. If there were only one woman’s *happiness* at stake, your course would be plain—

so plain, that for me to attempt to point it out would be an insult to your intelligence and your manhood. You would have simply to do your duty by the woman who loves you, and keep from her to your dying day all knowledge of the fact that you have made a mistake. But this affair is more complicated ; the happiness of two women is involved, and, I believe, the very life of one. In regard to *you* both women occupy the same position and are entitled to the same consideration. I yield to no man in respect for truth and honor, to no man in regard for the sacredness of a plighted word. But I say that for a man to marry one woman in the flesh, when he has already espoused another woman in the spirit, is to make of his life an incarnate lie. I say that for a man to deceive a woman with the impression that his love is hers, when in reality it belongs to another woman, is to be guilty of the blackest and basest treachery. He may delude himself—may call it by any name he pleases, but the unglossed, naked fact will be that he receives a genuine value for which he returns a fraudulent equivalent. Maud Tinsley holds the body of your promise, but all spirit, all vital force has gone out of it, and it is a mere corpse which should be buried as speedily as possible."

There was silence for a moment, and then Winthrope spoke again :

" I don't judge you, Ravenel. I believe you to

be a true and honorable man. I believe that you regret that this thing should have happened, and that you would have prevented it had the power rested with you. I know that this love was born into your heart without your knowledge, and that you failed to recognize its existence until there was no longer a possibility of subduing it. I know you have, as you say, fought and wrestled with nature, and striven to do murder under the impression that thereby truth and honor would be subserved. Believing this and knowing this, I have thrust myself into your affairs, and have taken upon me that which no man has a right to do unsolicited. When I get through I shall ask your forgiveness, but first I want to show you what looks to me like the right in this matter. I tell you, Ravenel, the only true and honorable and manly course will be to go to Maud Tinsley, and lay the whole matter before her. You must hold back, or palliate, or soften nothing—and you must ask her to release you.”

Ravenel groaned.

“Yes, I know it’s a hateful piece of business; but it must be done. I understand your position, and can enter into and sympathize with your feelings. The one woman having your love, in return for hers, receives full value: over the other woman, who has only your promise, your *manhood* yearns, because you must take from her *even that*. But look you, Ravenel, hesitation

here is cruelty—the refinement of cruelty, and to three victims. A man has a right to make himself suffer if he will ; but he has no right to prolong the pain of others. If you had a patient under the knife would you delay the operation one-sixteenth of a second longer than was absolutely necessary? Certainly not. Then don't do it now."

Ravenel held out his hand.

"You are a better surgeon than I," he said. "You cut deep, but you come at the root of a thing. I thank you for showing me the truth."

Winthrope went over to the table and moved aside a pile of manuscript, and laid writing materials in readiness.

"You'd better write," he said. "It will be easier for both."

Ravenel drew back : he could not write the letter here ; his feeling was against it.

"Not yet," he said. "I must think the matter over. I will write from my office."

As he turned to leave the room, he looked at Winthrope curiously.

"Why have you done this?" he questioned abruptly. "Not for my sake."

"No", Winthrope answered. "For Jean's."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DANVERS went home very much troubled in his mind about Jean. Ever since the night when she had helped him in his sore distress, when she had trusted him, and gone with him through the night and the darkness, intent on aiding him and his child, without a thought of herself, or of what people might say of her, Danvers had in some sort adopted Jean. It needed only the mention of her name, or that a thought of her should cross his mind, to cause all the chivalry—of which even rough men have their share—in Danvers' nature to come to the front. Her pallor, and the general forlornness of her aspect for the past weeks, dating, indeed, as nearly as he could reckon, from the afternoon of the storm on the mountain, appealed to the man.

"She'll be gwine like ther doctor, ef somethin' ain't done ter hinder," he told his wife. "She air ez lonesome lookin' ez er spring chicken arter a hard rain, an' she don't weigh no mor'n nothin'. *Thar's er favor o' ther doctor, at ther las', er-growin' in her face, an' it makes me ache ter view*

it—it looks nigh kin ter death. I'm racked in sperrit 'bout Miss Jean. She's wiltin' like er ter-backer plant whar's tetched with frost."

Mrs. Danvers jogged the cradle with her foot, and stooped for a cob from the old split basket in the chimney-corner, to prop up the lid of the oven, so that the dinner biscuit should not burn.

"Maybe Miss Jean's in trouble," she suggested. "It's spring-time with her now, an' her heart's tender an' easy ter bruise with keerless, awk'ard handling'. Women folks hev troubles—oneasiness, an' achin's in thar feelin's, when ther sap begins ter stir, an' new roots ter strike down. 'Twill pass when summer comes ter her;" the woman's eyes shone, and she lifted the infant from the cradle and laid him on her breast.

Danvers turned his old wool hat slowly in his hand, and moved his chair back, with the harsh, grating sound a chair always makes on a bare floor. A house-chicken huddled in the ashes beside the chip-basket turned its bright eye up, and took into consideration a project for roosting on his knee. Danvers put his hat back on his head: his face and voice were troubled.

"Looks ter me like winter war closin' 'round her—winter with snow an' ice an' bitter wind a-blowin'," he remarked. "Thar's er pinched, frost-bitten look on thet po' little face o' hern, thet I ain't got no use fur. I feel sorter like 'twar er crippled creeter, a body war feared ter

tu'n loose lest it mout starve, an' feard to hol' on ter lest, it mout bu'st its heart pinin'."

"'Tain't no use ter pester," Mrs. Danvers drawled sententiously; "wimmin creeters air made dif'ent. Miss Jean will work roun' arter 'while an' come at what she needs. Happen 'tis ther sperrit o' grace workin' in her same ez salt-risin's in ther bread; she haven't got religion. Men-folks never understand—'taint ter be looked for in 'em."

But Danvers thought that he could understand very well, in spite of belonging to the more obtuse sex. He did not believe that religion, or spiritual movings, in the sense his wife indicated, had aught to do with the matter in hand. He considered that it had its origin in something far more personal. Religion, with Danvers, was a solemn and serious, but entirely extraneous thing, germane to life, but in a remote degree. He had none himself, and in some states of mind deplored his destitution, in others was reconciled to it. There was "a right smart chunk o' salvation in ther family," he was wont to observe. His wife and his mother were both "professors." Arguing from the process and effects of grace, as he knew it, he decided that religion could not be used as a stalking horse for Jean's trouble, and he was of opinion that the probabilities were in favor of his knowing more of Jean's nature and affairs than could his wife, seeing that his opportunities for *observation* had been greater.

That Dr. Ravenel was in love with Jean he knew full well; he had seen the man off guard on one occasion, and his expression had betrayed him. He thought it likely, too, that Jean might reciprocate the doctor's feeling, for "Ravenel war er well-made chap, with er head upon his shoulders, an' a tongue inside ov it, fit ter charm ther birds frum off ther bushes." That the pair were lovers—or would be, were all difficulties removed, Danvers had long ago decided. That there should be difficulties appeared, also, but the natural sequence, and Danvers only wished he could be assure of their nature as he was of their existence. He pondered the matter for a day or two, taking it to bed with him at night, and to work with him during the day, and finally arrived at the conclusion that the worst obstruction in the matter must be the parson's daughter. He remembered the talk of the men on the porch of the Black Bear, and the other village gossip.

"Ef ther young lady hev got er grip on Ravenel," he thought, "ther time hev come to loose it. Men are naught but putty in ther hands o' womenkind, an' er gal should hev some mercy. Er man kin say a word sometimes, out o' foolishness, an' pleasure in a woman's looks, an' then hev ter stand by it t'well his heart breaks. Ef Miss Maud could know ther thing I knows, she'd let him go an' welcome. She ought ter know it too afore it gits too late, fur ef she an' ther doctor

put out from shore in ther same boat, an' ther thought o' Miss Jean keeps hangin' round 'em like river fog, 'twill be damned onhealthy fur all three. Miss Maud ain't three inches deep, but she could hold out ter trickle a right smart while—an' Ravenel dunno how ter let er thing slip: he's too tight built, an' too squar in ther jaw."

Then he fell to ruminating how Maud could be made to realize the existing state of the case. He recognized the difficulties in the way of Ravenel's explaining the matter himself. "'Twould take er sight o' grit fur er man ter do an' onhandy thing like that, an' 'tain't one in twenty got it," he averred and dismissed that point from his calculations. It seemed to him necessary that there should be outside interference.

It never occurred to Danvers that he was in any way officious, that his interest in the concerns of his betters was superfluous, or that whoseever business it might be to set matters straight, it was clearly none of his. His life and his notions were simple to a degree. He followed the dictates of his nature in faith and seriousness, and obeyed the impulses that were in him. He was used to taking interest in his neighbors, and, if he liked a man or woman, and saw them in trouble and fancied that he could be of use, the right and natural thing to him would be "to whirl right in an' help 'em." That was being neighborly. And *for* conventionality—he had no knowledge of

the word, and no instinct as to the thing behind it.

Of course if he did not like a man or woman, Danvers could stand on the bank and see them struggle in mid-current, or even run their boat on reefs and snags, and never move a finger; and nothing short of their being in danger of going to the bottom before his eyes would conquer his indifference. But he liked Ravenel, and was devoted to Jean, while for Maud Tinsley he cared not the value of a last year's cotton-boll.

Going into Melrose one day with his mind in a state of perplexity as to what had better be done, Danvers chanced to see the Reverend Arthur Tinsley leaning on his own front gate, and immediately lounged across the way to have a chat with him. Mr. Tinsley was popular with the poor men in his parish, even as Dr. Monteith had been; they said he "never sot hisself above 'em an' talked down; he stood plumb, an' 'lowed another man know'd somethin' same ez he did."

When the health of the respective families had been disposed of, and the relative weight and value of the neighbors' cotton crops discussed, and a bit or two of local gossip exchanged and the sky searched for a sign of rain, Danvers began to stalk the subject he had in mind—delicately at first, until he should be sure that the wind was in his favor.

"Hev you-un hearn from Miss Jean to-day?"

he drawled, stooping for a bit of wood, and taking out his knife. "I stopped by ther gate ez I come along, but I never seed nobody ter ax. I hev hearn ez how she war ailin' more'n common."

"I hope not," the minister answered cheerfully. "I was there yesterday and she seemed about as usual. The doctor says there's no organic trouble: that she's over-worked herself, and must have rest and care. We'll have her about as blithe as a bird before long I hope. She's had a hard time since the doctor died, poor child, and she will never spare herself."

"Naw, sir, she won't," assented Danvers; "she pulls squar agin ther collar, an' never balks no matter how steep ther hill is, nor how heavy ther load. Thar's mighty few like Miss Jean."

"Stick to that, Danvers," was the genial comment. "You'll find a good many of us agree with you."

Danvers took off his hat, doubled the brim under the sides and replaced it on his head. The wind was in his favor, and he had some hope that the hunt might prove successful.

"What doctor hev she hed?" he questioned, knowing perfectly, but speaking with intention.

"The man from Winston."

"Why not Ravenel?"

The minister laughed. "I haven't gone into *the case*," he said, "but if you want a horseback

opinion, I should say it was a fancy. Sick girls are given to fancies. Perhaps she thinks the Winston doctor may know more than Ravenel. His head is gray, you know."

"Shucks," retorted Danvers, "that's foolishness. Ef er young fellow takes ter knowledge right, it stands ter reason ez he'll git ahead o' an older man. His start is plumb against t'other fellow's middle mile-stone. Looks funny fur Miss Jean ter turn her back on Dr. Ravenel."

"Sick girls have whims," repeated Mr. Tinsley.

"Miss Jean air stouter growth en thet," Danvers maintained; "it takes a right smart wind to shake her. Ravenel's close-grained too. I 'lowed they war sweethearts one time—or gwine ter be. They've had a fallin' out, looks like. It's a monstrous pity;" he looked the other man straight in the eyes as he spoke.

"What makes you think that?" Mr. Tinsley demanded hastily. He had no intention of encouraging gossip, but his interest in the matter was deep; and then he knew his man sufficiently to be pretty sure that Danvers was speaking with a purpose. His manner, too, was simple and straightforward; there was no suggestion of impertinence about it.

"Er sight o' things—float, you know, thet shows ther way ther current's settin'. Thar's one thing though I've caught an' fetched to bank—" then he quietly related the incidents of Jean's

visit to his house, the storm, and that which followed.

"I never seed er man take on like Ravenel. Thet thar woods war like ther vale o' Death, with ther crash o' fallin' timber an' ther roarin' o' wind an' thunder. Ther lightnin' war awful to look at—long wrigglin' snakes o' fire cross-cuttin' ther sky every which-er-way. Twar enouf ter start ther sweat on er man's hide fur fear, an' freeze it 'fo' it dried. But Lord! Ravenel never noticed none of it; all his thought was on Miss Jean an' how ter git to her quick ez he could. I never seed a man git over groun' like he done—ef salvation had been layin' in ther path he'd er jumped over it an' kep' on—look like he war aimin' ter out-run ther storm. I never glimpsed him from ther minute he quit ther cle'rin', t'well I come on 'em agin thet rock. He hed Miss Jean in his arms then, an' er look on his face a man don't w'ar 'cept when his heart is full o' ther woman whar's restin' on it. Ef ther doctor ain't in love with Miss Jean, then I never keered nothin' 'bout my wife when I married her."

"Looks lie sometimes," suggested the minister absently.

"Not thet sort don't," affirmed the other. "Ravenel didn't know no human seed him. Miss Jean didn't. He'd snatched off his coat an' wrapped her in it, an' was holdin' her so ez ther

storm shouldn't strike her—sort o' shelterin' her with his body. He don't know yet I war thar; I never tole no person t'well now. Ther man war all broke up an' showed jus' what war inside o' him."

There were a few more words and then Danvers passed on down the street in the direction of the Black Bear. Mr. Tinsley took his arms off the gate, and stood looking away into the distance. His face was thoughtful, and he sighed once or twice.

A negro boy approached whistling a revival tune with a rollicking *abandon* hardly consonant with a realization of the nothingness of life. He brought it to an abrupt close as he reached the gate, touched his hat to Mr. Tinsley and handed him a letter. Dr. Ravenel had given it to him, he said, with orders to deliver it promptly. Should he wait for an answer?

No: if the letter should require an answer Mr. Tinsley would send to the office himself. He turned the envelope in his hand and saw that it was addressed to his daughter.

The thought of writing to the minister himself, and putting the matter in his hands, had crossed Ravenel's mind; but he put it aside. It seemed to him a cowardly thing to force another man into the position which he found so obnoxious. Then, too, Maud, whatever might be her decision, would

perhaps prefer to keep the affair secret. At all events the choice should be given her.

He did not bargain for Danvers's interference, or that his messenger would deliver the letter into the minister's own hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MAUD was in the sitting-room and looked up and smiled when her father entered. She was leaning back in an easy chair, and had a bit of pretty sewing in her hands. On the table near her stood a little basket filled with embroidery and dainty feminine belongings. One slippered foot was on the fender, and the arch of the shapely instep was visible. The dark wine color of her gown enhanced the fairness of her face, the golden glory of her hair.

The father looked at her, and thrust the letter in his pocket, and sat down in a chair near by, and fell to picturing to himself what Abraham's sensations must have been, as he journeyed into the land of Moriah, and drew nigh unto the appointed place. In imagination he could see it all: the plain, the hill, the man well stricken in years, and the young lad bearing on his shoulders the wood for the sacrifice. He had always taken whimsical exception to the bearing of that wood; had looked upon it as a needless cruelty. He could enter into Abraham's feelings better now, and realize that details were of small importance—what could it matter, after all, since the father must bear the knife?

The letter in his pocket weighed on his spirit like an undiscovered crime. He could not make up his mind to give it to her yet; she looked so peaceful: he must prepare the way a little. His heart yearned over her and his courage waxed feeble.

"Tom Bryce was here this morning, father," Maud said, glancing across at him. "He came while you were out and was much disappointed not to see you. His sweetheart has fixed the day, he said, and he wanted to see you about the wedding."

Tom Bryce was the one-armed man from the oil-mill. He had been engaged to one of the village girls for a month or so, and the marriage would take place within a week. Maud took considerable interest in the affair, as was natural.

"I met him in the village, and we talked the matter over," Mr. Tinsley answered. "The fellow seems very happy. He asked me if I thought that Jean Monteith would come to his wedding—he wanted to ask her, but felt shy about it. For some reason he seems to set considerable store by Jean. I'm glad Tom is going to marry—he is a sober, steady man, and the girl is a good girl. They seem to love each other."

Maud raised her head sedately. "Most people do who marry, father. That is an understood thing. You speak as though it were unusual."

"It is more unusual than you think, my dear.

You know so little of the world, or of men. Marriages with scant stock of love, or none, are not rare. For instance, a man may make a blunder—may think a woman has his love, when in reality she only holds his fancy. He may woo her, even ask her to be his wife, and find out after all that he doesn't love her as he ought to love her. What should he do in such a case?"

Maud considered. "I don't quite understand you, father. You mean a man may imagine himself in love with a woman, and not be in love with her? How could that happen? A man would *know*."

"Not always, dear. Circumstances mislead a man sometimes, or the woman may—consciously or unconsciously. The thing has happened more than once and sorrow has come of it. The question is how the pain should be apportioned—who must bear the bulk of it."

"Why, of course, the man should! A man has no right to make a mistake like that. He ought to *know*." Maud's tone was positive.

"No man can be infallible like that. A man is only human. He is liable to blunder, to slip and stumble and fall. Where would be the necessity for love and charity and forbearance with one another if people could always *know*. It is our mistakes that bind us together."

"A man has no right to make a mistake like that," repeated Maud doggedly: "and if he should

he ought to bear all the painful consequences himself."

"But can he? These matters are so complex. Does any creature stand so much alone that the consequences of his acts are confined to himself? If it should be—then, God pity the creature! But, Maud, suppose there should be another woman; what would you say then?"

Maud's face hardened. "I should say that there had been treachery and bad faith somewhere," she answered coldly, "and that the man had behaved dishonorably."

"Not necessarily. Listen, Maud: suppose the man's fancy had been caught and he, mistaking the feeling for love, engaged himself; and after that another woman, different from the first, less beautiful, but better suited to his needs, should cross his path. Suppose, without intention on either side to be disloyal, love should grow as love can grow, and a man not be conscious of it till it bursts on him full-grown—suppose, I say, love like this should come, what ought a man to do?"

"Stamp it out," Maud answered, "and keep his promise to the first. There can be no question about that. You don't consider the first at all."

"My dear, I'm considering her all the time. Don't you understand and see that the worst that *could* happen to a woman would be to marry a *man* who has never rightly loved her?"

Maud shook her head. "How can you know that?" she demanded astutely. "If your man made one mistake, he might make another. I think he would be a very weak and inconsequent person not to know his own mind the first time. And I think any man who breaks his word dishonorable."

Mr. Tinsley looked at his daughter curiously. "Your judgment bears heavy on most of us," he observed. "It is impossible always to know our own minds: even the strongest of us only approximate. And a word sometimes is more honored in the breach than in the observance. If, under a mistake, I should swear to take a man's life, and find out in time that I'd done him wrong, and yet persist, because I'd pledged my word, I should be a murderer of the most brutal type, and would deserve to be lynched. You must not be so hard. We must strive and struggle and suffer enough, God knows, even to keep in sight of righteousness: we should be merciful to one another. That's the way the idea of hell was born—through vindictiveness and hard judgment pushed to the extreme. Change comes, it will, it must; it is the law. We block and impede it—or try to, like ants laying straws before an elephant to keep him from trampling their habitation. Even love changes its relations, goes where it must, like air and sunshine—subject to laws perhaps; but laws past our *finding* out. We can't reason about these

things. We can only strive to do the best for ourselves and others as we go along."

Maud gazed at her father with wide-open eyes. He was an anomaly to her, he always had been. She thought him weak sometimes, and that he generalized too much. As to knowing one's own mind—that was easy: she always knew *hers*. There were facts on the very outside of every case from which judgment could be formed. Maud was great on facts—or rather on her own conception of facts: she considered them unalterable, and lacked subtlety to see that their fixity must be relative.

Mr. Tinsley drew the letter from his pocket; there did not seem to be any use for further conversation. His daughter was as much a mystery to him as he was to her. She looked fair and soft and sweet, and ordinarily he would find her so; but he never attempted to get below the surface that he did not turn the edge of his tool. He was used to limitations—could make allowance for them; but with Maud he would seem to come against them with such force as to cause him acute pain.

Maud smiled at sight of the hand-writing, and, with a pretty gesture of apology, broke the seal. It was not long; but she read it over twice, the smile on her face giving place to pallor.

Her father watched her, with the heart in his bosom bleeding. He wanted to gather her into

his arms, to comfort her on his breast, with words of love and tender kisses; to tell her that he understood and sympathized, and would help her bear her trouble. When her face paled, he winced, and bent forward and laid his hand on hers. But Maud withdrew her hand to turn the page: the lines about her mouth deepened and a steely gleam came into her eyes.

So this was the explanation of the change in Ravenel! He was in love with Jean Monteith—had been in love with her for weeks, for months, almost ever since his engagement to herself. The village gossip had been true. She had not believed it and had held to Ravenel, and been true, and had made sacrifices for love's sake. And all the time the man for whom she had done so much was loving another woman. It was hard on Maud, and she felt it so, and a great pity for herself came into her heart accompanied by fierce hatred of Jean, and, in a sort, of Ravenel.

True, no names were mentioned, nor did Ravenel, even indirectly, allude to his love for another woman. Nor did he ask for his release—he could not: he simply told her, as gently as he could, of the discovery of his real feelings for her, and left the decision as to what should be their future relations in her hands. It was a manly, earnest letter; he blamed himself unsparingly for the false position into which his precipitation had drawn them both, and closed with an appeal that,

if she should decide to let matters remain as they were, she would be patient with him and help him to be faithful.

But Maud could see nothing but the affront to herself. Her self-love rose, and struck out passionately. How dared he do such a thing as this!—how *dared* he? It was all Jean's fault—Jean's treachery from beginning to end. Fiercely she summoned Ravenel and Jean to the bar of her judgment; she was hard and bitter and cruel to them in her mind, as a woman who feels herself so wronged will be.

She never felt Ravenel's pain at all, nor saw the struggle he had made, nor gave him credit for having tried—for still trying to do his best, nor understood what he must have gone through ere he could bring himself to write. She only saw that he had taken back that which he had given *her*, and bestowed it on another woman. She could not realize that she had only held his fancy: that never once had she stirred the depths of his nature or possessed his love. Emotions surged within her; but prominent among them, dominating them, was the feeling that *she* had been outraged; that *her* love had been slighted, *her* happiness made a thing of naught. His appeal touched her no more than the sighing of the wind: she could not understand it. Her love for Ravenel withered and died in the hot blast of her anger. She longed to hurt him; to make him

feel how dishonorable she thought him. Acting on the impulse she handed the letter to her father. Her father thought well of Ravenel. He should see Ravenel as she saw him.

The minister's face underwent some changes as he read, and finally settled into a look of wistful comprehension.

"It was a hard thing to do," he said slowly. "I honor him that he has had the manhood to do it."

Maud's heart swelled: she had expected a burst of indignation, of sympathy, of invective. No one seemed to care for her, or to realize the way in which she had been treated. They were all against her—all for Jean!—Winthrope, Ravenel, even her own father!—If her father had cared he could never have spoken of Ravenel as he had just done. Her lip quivered and a storm of angry tears came to her eyes. She turned her head away and when her father sought to take her in his arms she repulsed him. Poor Maud!

Presently she turned and drew a ring from her finger and laid it on the table.

"Will you give that to Dr. Ravenel?" she said.

Mr. Tinsley looked at her wistfully.

"Without a word, daughter? So—as one throws a bone to a dog?"

"There is nothing to say," Maud answered coldly. "I think he has behaved dishonorably—

not like a gentleman. If you wish you can tell him that."

Then she took the letter and deliberately tore it in half, then in quarters, and threw it into the fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

MORE than a week elapsed after Ravenel had obtained his release before he sought Jean. He could not go directly from one woman to another: his instincts revolted from it. He knew that Maud was going away—that she had accepted the invitation of friends she had made the previous summer, to visit them in the North; and he felt that it would be more delicate, more generous, that he owed it to her in fact, to wait until she should be out of the place before he should betake himself to her rival.

On the afternoon of the day following the one on which Maud left Melrose, a note was brought to Ravenel's office. It was from Jean and contained only one line—"Come to me. There is something I must tell—something I must ask you." It was signed with initials, and the writing looked hurried and unequal, as though her hand had trembled, or her courage had failed her.

Ravenel obeyed the summons at once. He found Jean in the study, looking wan and pale, like an arbutus flower in the end of winter. She seemed smaller, more like a child, than ever

standing on the hearthrug in her heavy black gown. Ravenel advanced with hand outstretched, the love in his heart revealed at last in his face, in his voice.

"You sent for me," he said gently; "you wanted me." He sought to take her hand.

Jean drew back: her hand rested on a pile of manuscript: she leaned against the edge of the table to steady herself.

"Wait," she said, "when I have told you—when you understand—then, if you will. Not now."

She remained standing, and Ravenel stood also, looking down at her in wonderment. What could she have to confess—or he to forgive? The idea was preposterous. He smiled. It was *he* who must make confession, while she should listen. He moved nearer to her: words thronged upon him—words which his eyes already spoke; which his lips burned to utter. He wanted Jean to look at him: while her eyes had that far-away look, and her hands moved so nervously he could not tell his story, could not pour out the love that was in him.

Jean was gathering her strength to make her confession: to sue for pardon. Suddenly she raised her head and her eyes met his: she moved her hand and pointed to some lines which her *palm* had covered.

Ravenel bent down and read his own name.

below that of Dr. Monteith, on what looked to be the title-page of a book. He felt bewildered.

"I don't understand," he said.

"No," she answered, "I must tell you."

Then she told him simply, quietly, in as few words as possible, the story of her father's life—briefly she touched on its disappointment, its pathos, its mournful tragedy. Then she spoke of her father's work, of the comfort it had been, of his interest and pride in it, of his grief to find that here too he would be frustrated: that death would come ere the work could be completed. She told him of her father's charge to her, and of her promise. Her voice had been steady at first, but now it faltered and the slow tears fell, one by one, as she told how the promise had been kept.

"I never realized what I was doing," she said. "I was in a dream, from which I only roused that night—a week ago—when some one brought me home, and they sent for you. I think I must have been going to you then—to tell you; but all that is dim and misty, only my father and you both seemed to be in the room, and I knew that I had wronged you both; but *you* the most. It was as though I were possessed: my one idea became a monomania, it shut out all except itself. Every thing was absorbed in it, even my perception of right and wrong. His work was so much to him—his life had been so hard—I wanted—" Her voice shook: sobs rose and choked her.

Ravenel's eyes were on her face, his heart was full of yearning tenderness ; but he would not speak : he waited for the appeal which he knew must come.

Jean went on : " I could not go away because of my sister's need of me, so I went to you. When you would not help me, I tried to get at what I wanted by myself ; but I could not. Then I grew desperate. I said that *nothing* should stand between me and the fulfillment of my vow."

" When you came to me that time in my office, had you *this* in your mind ? Was this the work to which you alluded ? " Ravenel interrupted.

" Yes : I hoped you would teach me, would have no prejudices, because you had studied in the North where woman's work is less circumscribed than with us. But you refused, and then I failed myself, and after that the idea came into my head to make you teach me unawares : to talk to you and rouse your interest, and learn that way. My father said once that I could draw the thoughts from a man's brain and the words from his mouth by my earnestness, by the intensity of my will. I tried with you—not knowing where it would lead me, or to what"—her tone changed, grew passionate. " Oh, forgive me ! forgive me ! I tried not to tell you—I struggled hard ; but the wrong I have done you will not let me rest : it weighs on *me* here—here—until I can not breathe—" Her hands were pressed against her breast and then stretched out to him appealingly.

Ravenel took her hands in his and drew her to his breast. "My love," he whispered, "rest you here in your home at last. You did not know—you could not understand; how should you? Forgive you?—yes: freely, fully, for the sake of the love, the light you have brought into my life. My darling, you know that my love is yours, has been yours since that night when you sang out yonder by the gate, and I listened, and did not know what stirred my heart and made my pulses thrill. You have but taken that which was your own, for with my love, my life, my thought, every fiber of my being became yours, to do with as you will. Do not let it trouble you or think of it again. Look at me, my darling, let me see your face, and read your answer in your eyes. You will not?—rest then, my love, my wife." His voice was tender and passionate; he held her close, and sheltered her face with his hand, as he had done when the storm was around them. His heart beat; but his face was calm, and in his eyes was the light of a great joy.

Jean raised her head. "You understand?" she questioned wonderingly. "You understand it all and you forgive me?"

"Sweetheart, I love you. Isn't that enough? The only thing I care for is that you should have suffered. If you could have trusted me that day—if only you could have trusted me!" He bent his head and sought to touch her lips with his.

But Jean drew back ; a thought of Maud, and of her words that evening, returned and stung her. She strove to free herself from Ravenel's embrace.

"You must not—you have no right. I remember now ! Let me go!—in mercy let me go !"

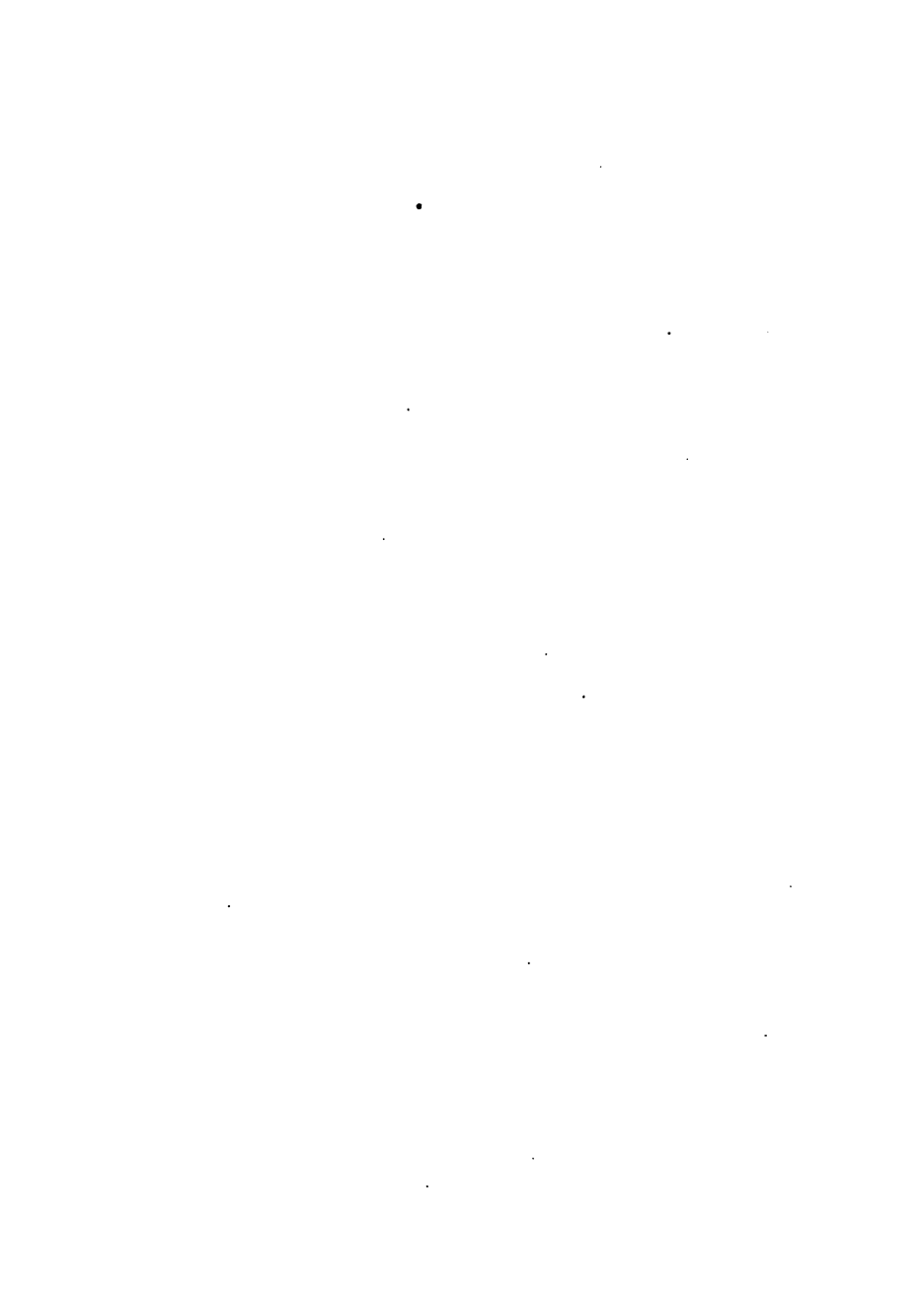
Ravenel drew her closer. "That is past," he said ; "we saw our mistake before it was too late. We will not speak of it, my love. It is past and done with."

Later, when all things had been straightened out between them and they sat together in the firelight, Jean drew the manuscript toward her and rested her cheek on the page whereon the two names lay together, and touched them with her lips.

"Only these two," she murmured softly, "yours and his—only these two in my life and my heart forever."

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